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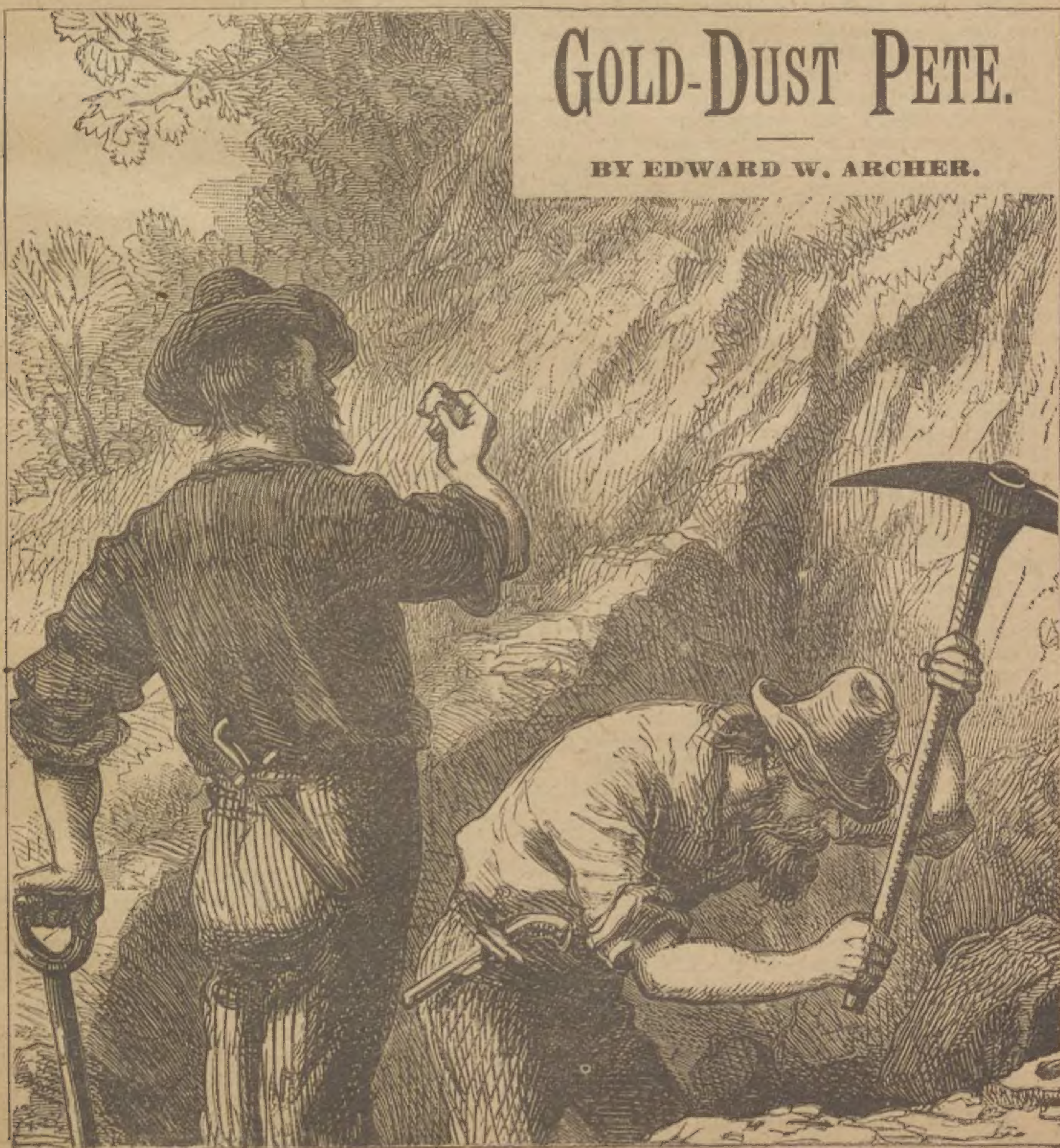
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Gold-Dust Pete;

OR,

LANK LUTE, THE OLD COLORADO HUNTER.

BY EDWARD W. ARCHER.

CHAPTER I.

AN UGLY CUSTOMER.

It was a few months after the discovery of gold in the Pike's Peak region, still in the early summer of 1859. Away from the haunts of civilized man, far up among the head-waters of Cherry Creek, almost beneath the shade of the everlasting mountain which gave its name to the diggings, a young man was wandering, alone.

There was nothing peculiarly striking in the appearance or dress of the young man, save that in the former he gave evidence of having been well bred, and the latter had evidently been selected in the States, for the wear and tear of mining and prospecting. In age he might have seen twenty-five years; but however many, they had given him a strong and well-developed frame, fitted by nature for the work which he had now chosen.

Like all who frequented that wild region, he was well-armed, and kept something of a lookout for danger, since the Utes, who at times frequented those hills, had shown anything but a friendly regard for the miners.

"How unfortunate that I haven't a spade," ran the young adventurer's thoughts, as he picked up a fragment of rock and narrowly examined it. "I am sure this region, which doesn't seem to have been prospected much, must be rich in gold. It seems scarcely proper to expect much surface mining, and who knows but that a few yards beneath my feet there may be treasures of untold value?"

He stamped upon the ground, and gazed down earnestly, as though to penetrate the secret held by the dark earth.

"No matter," he reflected. "When I am a little stronger I will take a spade, and maybe a companion or two, and come out this way. This fever has made me so weak that I almost seem once more a child. Yet I am gaining rapidly, and with good fortune shall be as strong in one more week as ever. It must be near noon, and I am seven or eight miles from camp. My companions will miss me, and perhaps feel anxious upon my account."

He glanced at a heavy mountain crag, nearly a mile further on.

"But, I believe I will go up there before I return," he ejaculated. "If that crag *should* be a gold-bearing ledge, and it looks much like it, my fortune may be made."

It was a hard route to the ledge in question, though, had he been in usual strength, the young man would scarcely have regarded the effort. As it was, he paused often to rest.

At length the point was neared.

"One more good strong pull, and I will be there," he muttered.

At that moment there came a rustling and crashing of the bushes near. Rodney Drew

knew that a bear was at hand, and cocking his rifle, he waited for the animal to appear.

Very soon an enormous, ugly-looking head came into view, and aiming at one of the eyes, Drew fired. That the shot took effect was evident, for the head came at once to the earth, and the hunter rushed forward, loosening his knife in the sheath as he approached.

Imagine his consternation, however, ere half the distance was passed, at beholding the head arise again, and a full-grown grizzly rush from the thicket, roaring most profoundly with pain and rage.

Rodney had barely time to draw his revolver, dropping all else, when the enraged beast was upon him.

The first shot, which he fired almost at the moment of collision, served to turn the animal aside, and being thus freed for a moment, Rodney thought to flee.

But, though a huge, lumbering mass to look upon, the bear was far from being clumsy in close action. It wheeled and grasped his enemy by the hem of his blouse, almost before the young man had taken a step.

Though the strong cloth tore easily when Drew gave a terrified spring, nothing but certain death seemed to stare the luckless hunter in the face. Determined to die game, he opened another attack from his revolver, firing three more shots in quick succession. One of these, discharged into the open mouth of the brute, as he was about to close his jaws upon the weapon, seemed to stagger him severely.

Again Rodney thought of flight. Again was he overhauled by the bear, and knocked down by a heavy blow upon the shoulder, from the enraged animal's paw.

Fortunately the hand which held his revolver was not paralyzed by the stroke, and, as the momentum of the immense creature carried him over the prostrate youth, the latter succeeded in firing still one more shot at his triumphant adversary. Then, with a fearful shudder, the stricken man closed his eyes, and awaited the death which he had no strength to avert.

But the end was not yet. At that fearful moment there came the loud crack of a rifle, not far away, and from the heavy "thud" Rodney knew that his terrible foe had been shot almost over him.

This sudden release from the very jaws of death brought with it a sudden unconsciousness.

"Come, my boy; ye kin git up now," exclaimed the deliverer, advancing. "The great cuss is dead enough by this time. Guess ye won't pitch into another grizzly alone, right away!"

"Well, bless me if the feller didn't faint dead away!" he exclaimed, seeing the helpless condition of Rodney. "Don't much blame him, either, for I wouldn't like tew face a grizzly as he done."

"No, I did not faint from fear," Drew was barely able to articulate. "Just wait till I get my breath, and I'll tell you how it was."

In a few minutes he was quite recovered, and resumed:

"I am one of the miners at Cobble Run, nine or ten miles from here. I have been sick two weeks with the fever, and am so weak now I

cannot work. I was quite tired out before I got here. I am not used to fainting when there is any danger."

"I guess ye'r' about right," said the newcomer. "I know what these confounded fevers are, and if you've had one of them I don't blame ye for givin' out. But you fit the b'ar well, I'll say that for ye. Though, ye war foolish in startin' the fuss."

"I had no idea it was a grizzly. I thought it a common bear, and so fired when he stuck his head out."

Rodney Drew had gained his feet, though with some difficulty, and now had an opportunity to scrutinize his interlocutor, as the latter stepped beside the fallen bear. The result of his investigations may be briefly stated.

A tall, thin man, with great rolls of muscle standing out in almost painful relief upon arms and frame, half-savage and half-hunter in dress. In addition to knife and rifle, he had a pair of heavy, single-barreled pistols stuck in his belt, as well as a small hatchet. He wore the ordinary Indian moccasins and leggings, a loose hunting-frock, fastened by the belt, and a small cap of beaver-skin, with the tail hanging down over one shoulder. The features were so sunburned and covered by a mat of hair and beard that it was difficult to say much about their general expression.

Seeing that the young man could walk only with difficulty, the old hunter sprang to his side, and gave him the assistance of his strong arm, saying:

"Never mind the bear. I see what you want, it's rest and a little repairin'. Gracious! How the feller tore yer shoulder! It's bleedin' fu'st best."

"That's nothing severe. I'll get back to the run in a little while, and then I can rest and doctor to my heart's content."

"If you undertake to see Cobble Run to-day, you'll never see it ag'in!" was the earnest assertion. "Come, I know a good place for ye to tie up, and mend. We can get there without trouble."

Did Rodney fear treachery? He knew that crimes of every kind abounded in the diggings, and none but well-tried friends were to be trusted. Still, the action of this man, in saving him from the bear had opened his heart to trust him.

Possibly the stranger knew what the thoughts of Drew were likely to be, since he added:

"Ye needn't be afeard o' me, my boy, acause all the old settlers hereabouts will tell ye that Lute Cook is tew be trusted. I've hunted and trapped along here for twenty year, till trappin' is all played out, and huntin' don't amount to much. Don't know but I shall have to dig for money like the rest of ye, yit."

"Then your name is Luther Cook," Rodney began, but was quickly interrupted.

"No, not *Luther*. Jest plain Lute; I shouldn't know about answerin' ter any other name. Now ye've got my handle—"

"Certainly, I should have given you my name before. It is Rodney Drew, of Batesburg, New York. And, once for all, let me thank you as earnestly as I can for the great service you have done me."

"None o' that. No milk and water fer me. The man what'll let a grizzly kill another fer the sake o' savin' a charge o' powder ain't one o' my kind."

Rodney's wounded shoulder having been bound up as well as circumstances permitted, the two men set forth.

CHAPTER II.

CENTURY AND SON.

Two persons were toiling in a dark rift, which seemed to extend far into the bowels of the mountains.

They were digging gold, and very easy was the work in that particular place. The very dirt was yellow with it, and from many places it was an easy task to pick up the golden grains. Each of the workmen had a small pouch in which to place the treasure when secured, and their plethoric state showed that the day's labor had been productive of good results.

One was a man of fifty years, tall and strongly made, with a face marked by deep traces of strong passions. As he worked, a knife and two revolvers stuck from his belt, while his rifle lay at a little distance. At the precise moment of which we speak, he was engaged in washing a pan of dirt in the small stream which ran through the place.

In like occupation his companions soon crouched beside the stream, and for some time the twain worked away in silence. But when the bottom of the pan was nearly reached, and the golden spangles began to predominate, the elder could no longer keep silent. Interspersing his words with a great variety of oaths, he proceeded to remark:

"Blow me sky-high if this don't beat all the diggin's I ever hearn of. If we've made a cent to-day we've gone up two hundred! How lucky we've took a turn off here into the desert."

"It is very fortunate," said the other, a young man, apparently not more than twenty years of age, delicate in build and feature, seeming, in fact, little fitted for the rough life of a miner. "We have every cause to be thankful for the—the—bad fortune which sent us again to the hills."

The young man hesitated somewhat, and a scowl of fierce anger darkened the face of the elder. When he spoke again his caths were more fearful than before. Indeed the great body of his speech was a string of epithets which would disgrace the language of a heathen.

"Let me alone. If my name is Pete Cent'ry, or, Gold-Dust Pete, and I allow it's both, I'll show 'em yit who's to be broke. Give me this kind of diggin' for ten more days, and I'll show 'em another bank in Denver what can't be broke!"

"Why not take the gold and go back to the States, where it can be more safely invested?" the youth asked.

"Oh, you are one of the kind that's afraid of every thing, but you have no need to be. Nobody knows any thing, nobody mistrusts a thing unless it be old Lute Cook, and he never'll go back on us. I don't kalkilate tew stay in Denver long, but I *shall* long enough tew learn a few skunks thar what I mean. You are a bully

boy to mix grog, and see *fair play*—you do fu'st best that way."

"But you know how I feel—"

"Come, come; no preachin'. You know how I feel, and that's all we need tew know. You ain't of age yit, and till that time, you'll do as I say. You've been trouble enough to me."

The youth said no more, but applied himself vigorously to cleaning up the pan of gold-specked dust in his hands. When this was done, the implements were hid in a natural cavity which nothing but a close inspection would have detected, and the miners prepared to return homeward.

The sun was getting low as they came in sight of the lonely cabin they had erected as a temporary dwelling.

The twain were a trifle surprised, soon after, at seeing a person step from the low door of the hut, and approach them. But, if they had felt any concern, it passed away as the intruder was recognized. It was Lute Cook.

"I've brought a feller up to your cabin, Pete, what got hurt by a grizzly."

The face of the elder Century darkened in a moment, while that of Charles showed a strong interest.

"What in Tophet is that for?" demanded Pete. "I told you never to bring anybody here, under any circumstances!"

"Yes, you told me suthin' o' that nater, and I never *have* brought any spyin' creater around ye. Now, I've tuk the liberty o' bringin' in this young feller, what's all used up, and you must nuss him till he's able to go back to Cobble Run."

"I must nuss him?" exclaimed Pete, while his hand sought a pistol. "I guess you've forgot yerself."

"Not any, and I see you hain't forgot, either. Now listen to reason. This young man is an honest fellow, who hasn't seen enough of the mines to know all the deviltry afloat. He is a pious chap, too, and wants to git away from some of his fellows down there. Now all you've got to do is, take care of him till he gits better, and then take him in with you. That'll stop him blowin' on ye, if ye should want to."

"But you no need to have brought him here in the fu'st place, and then all that trouble would have been saved," growled Century.

"No, Pete, he was a smart young man, and would have died away among the mountains. I wa'n't goin' to have him go off so easy, and so brought him here."

They conversed some time longer, and finally it was settled that Rodney Drew should be allowed to stay in the hut till he was able to work, when an interest in the diggings where Century was growing rich so rapidly, should be offered him, to secure his silence.

"By that time I'll be near ready to go back to Denver again, and he may take care of himself," said the still reluctant Pete.

Rodney was lying upon a rude couch which Lute had extemporized for him at one end of the room, and when the party entered he was sleeping.

At dusk Rodney awoke. He was slightly startled to find that he had slept so long, and looked about for Lute Cook. But that indi-

vidual was not there. Charles Century saw the young man's movements, and hastened to his side.

"How do you feel now, sir?" he asked in tones which sensibly opened the eyes of the person addressed.

"Quite sore and lame," he replied. "But I shall soon be better. I did not wish to trespass upon your hospitality, but Cook insisted, and I was quite helpless myself."

"Have no fears that you are trespassing," said Charles, in hearty tones. "We will do all that is possible to nurse you. You may yet feel thankful for the mishaps of to-day."

Pete hastened up at that moment, and with a quick message, sent the young man away, supplying his place beside the sufferer. Rodney could not see his features distinctly, and even had it been lighter, he would have recognized the fact that rough features frequently hide a heart well filled with human kindness.

What a different being Century appeared now! With rough but kind words to his guest, he succeeded very soon in making a good impression upon the young man whom chance had thrown beneath his roof.

Rodney ate but little, though the food which Charles prepared for him was very nice, considering that they were so far from many of the necessities of life.

Thankful and grateful, Rodney sunk into a quiet sleep.

In the morning he felt much better, though still weaker than on the preceding afternoon.

A week passed before Rodney felt strong enough to attempt the journey to Cobble Run. It was quite a pleasant week for him. Both of his entertainers were agreeable and kind, more especially Charles, with whom Rodney, however, found few opportunities for conversation.

At length a fine morning dawned, clear but cool, and as he breathed the refreshing air, Drew determined to seek his friends before the setting of the sun.

His intention was briefly communicated to his host at the morning meal. There was an expression of surprise and regret, but no more.

After the repast was finished, however, Pete Century drew the young man aside, and when they were quite alone, he began:

"So you're goin' tew leave us, are you?"

"I think I had better return to my mess to-day," was the reply.

"Wal, afore ye go thar's one thing I want tew talk tew ye about. Ye must know, from what ye've picked up, that we've suthin' of a little dust on hand."

"So I should presume, though I have never seen the products of your daily toil."

"Ye're right in supposin' it. And another thing, we've jest got intew bigger croppin's, and afore long we'll hev a rousin' pile of the yaller dirt. Now we don't want you to blow on us. D'ye understand that?"

"Certainly, sir; and I can assure you I have no intention of betraying my friends—those who have rendered me such services as you and your son have done."

"Wal, that ain't all, stranger. We want to dew the fair thing by you, and so we will make ye an offer. Ye can come right in and dig with

us, share in the same mess, and be one of our family, if you'll pull right up whar ye be, say nothin' tew anybody for a week or tew, and dig with us. Walk out to whar we dig, and see."

Rodney had felt quite a curiosity to behold the diggings where his entertainers alone found the precious metal, and though he had not at the moment any real intention of accepting the offer he had just heard, he gladly consented to walk over to the grounds.

The greatest expectations which he had felt were more than realized on reaching the place. The earth, full of glittering particles, showed beyond any doubt that immense wealth could be extracted from the soil in that vicinity.

Rodney did not long consider. The sight of so much gold, so accessible, drove away the scruples he had felt, and left him no room to doubt. A few months in those diggings, and if no evil betide, he could start for home a rich man.

The glisten of gold had dazzled his eyes as well as his judgment, just as Pete Century felt confident it would do.

"I think I will accept your offer," he said, after a short survey of the place.

"Of course we shall want a little bonus for getting you in so easy."

"Name it."

"Half that you wash the first week."

"You shall have it."

And so the bargain was made. After a few additional assurances, Rodney took his leave, trusting to return again and commence operations within two days, at most.

CHAPTER III.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY.

THE pure air, and his own jubilant feelings, lent strength to the steps of Drew, and with very few pauses, he approached Cobble Run. How he would delight to share his good fortune with some of the weary miners who were toiling there for barely more than a living! Nothing but the fact that he was bound to secrecy prevented him from rushing forward and proclaiming to one and all that the land of hopes lay near them.

He was within less than a mile of the diggings, and really began to feel uneasy as to how he should meet his brother miners, when a moving form startled him.

"Ha! Who is that?" he exclaimed, in audible tones. "I could almost take oath that I saw some one step behind that tree. I wonder if it is some miner's dodge?—or are the Utes up to their old game?"

He paused and glanced about for shelter. None was near. Then feeling quite sure that no real danger menaced him, he glanced at his ready rifle, and moved forward with an air of assurance.

His suspicions that there was no danger were soon confirmed, as one of his comrades stepped from behind the tree in question.

"How do you do, Jake Dodge?" was the young man's cheery greeting.

"Oh, comfortable," was the cool reply.

Rodney was slightly astonished at the manner of the man, but before he had time to consider much upon it, his thoughts were drawn to an-

other source of surprise. Two more of his late comrades were stealing up behind him!

Seeing that the young man had observed them, they came forward at an easier rate, and soon he was in the midst of the group. What did it mean?—those lowering brows and unusual aspects?

"If you were red-skins I should be in rather a tight place," he remarked, laughingly, for he knew not what interpretation to give such conduct.

"You are now!" exclaimed one.

And while two grasped him by the arms, the third pointed a revolver at his head!

Was it any wonder that the young man started, turned pale and trembled? The features of those about him gave the assurance that they did not jest, even had not one of them exclaimed:

"See, he shows his guilt!"

"That's so; we've got the rogue at last," chorused other voices.

Meanwhile his rifle, pistol and knife had been taken away, so that when he recovered speech he was unarmed and totally defenseless in the midst of the strange trio.

"Gentlemen, will you please tell me what all this means?" he finally found voice to ask.

"Oh ho! You don't know, of course! You can't play that. Come, now, tell us whar ye've put it, and we may let ye off easy, seein' you've been a purty good feller in times past," said Jake Dodge, who acted as spokesman of the party.

"Please explain yourself, Jake; I don't know what you mean," Rodney persisted.

"Oh, well, we'll soon bring ye to yer memory. Come into camp, and see what ye have to say for yerself."

Submitting with the best grace possible, Rodney was conducted to the mines, where the miners gazed upon him as though he were a wild beast. All work was immediately suspended, and amid a chorus of hoarse shouts and yells he was taken up to the tents, some forty rods away.

"Hang him! Shoot the rascal! Burn him alive!" were some of the more furious ejaculations.

By no means sure in his own mind as to what might be coming, Rodney reached the open space in the midst of the camp, and here preparations were at once made for a trial. And well the young man knew that from the verdict given where LYNCH LAW ruled, there could be no appeal!

In those times no delay ensued when a supposed criminal was to be tried. Twelve men were selected from the assemblage present, ranged in a semicircle, and then business was opened by one who had been a law student in the States.

"Fellow-citizens," he began, "the blackest crime known among us, the most diabolical, fiendish outrage which a miner can commit upon the personal property of another, is robbery. In a region like this, murder, committed in a moment of passion, may be excusable, to a certain degree. But the poor, low, thieving rascal who deliberately takes away the hard earnings of another, that he may revel with the ill-gotten

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spoils, is lower in the scale of humanity than the beast! I would say, lower as a human being than an oyster is as a fish.

"In our happy little community, up to the present time, no such unhappy affair had occurred. But at last the blow has fallen. One of our most quiet and peaceable men has been robbed of every ounce of his hard earnings. The man who is suspected of the crime is here, and our present duty is to investigate the facts, and find out the truth of the whole matter. Then, if guilty, we shall not hesitate to punish."

A hearty shout answered the last sentence, and the due forms were complied with. The jury were questioned and sworn, after which the principal witness, the man who had been robbed, was called upon to testify. He was an honest German, by name Carl Hoefenmark, and his testimony, divested of all superfluities, was as follows:

On the night of the robbery he had not retired until late, and in consequence had slept very soundly. During the latter portion of the night he had been awakened by some person moving about within the hut. He saw that it was Rodney Drew, and thinking him an honest fellow, had gone to sleep again. It was full day when he awoke again, and, on raising the corner of his blanket couch, to look for his bag of gold, was surprised at not finding it. He had searched far and near, but found nothing of it. As none could easily enter the tent without awakening some of the four sleepers, he felt sure it must have been taken by one of his messmates.

This ended his testimony. Rodney began to tremble, for he saw that a chain of circumstantial evidence was gathering about him.

Other witnesses testified that they saw Drew leave the tent before daybreak, that no person could have entered without their knowledge, and that the tent was uninjured, so that no one could have entered by stratagem. Neither of the other inmates had left the tent during the night, and before they did so every rag upon their persons and every nook of the tent was thoroughly searched. All to no purpose. The gold had been stolen, and Rodney Drew, who had disappeared at the same time, had been caught a week later, prowling in the forest not far away!

How uncertain is even *the best* of circumstantial evidence. Those who had come to the trial hoping that the young man would clear himself, began to shake their heads with doubt as the mass of evidence was given in.

When allowed to speak for himself, Rodney did so, in a voice trembling with emotion and fatigue. In brief tones he pleaded his utter innocence of the crime charged to him, and related the adventures of his sojourn. How he had started forth partially upon a prospecting tour, and how he had shot at the bear, which in turn attacked and disabled him. How he had been rescued and taken to the hut of a kind miner, where he remained until his wounds were healed. In confirmation he displayed his wounded shoulder, which was plainly recognized as the work of a grizzly's paw.

The would-be lawyer then summed up the evidence upon both sides, though taking care to make it look as dark as possible for Rodney.

The jury were then requested to make up their minds upon the verdict.

The twelve, upon whose decision so much of moment for the young man rested, conferred for a short time in the midst of the crowd, and then the foreman rose up.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are unable to agree in this noise and confusion. We will retire to some quiet place, and report when we reach a verdict. In the mean time keep the prisoner close."

They turned away toward one of the drinking saloons, most of the crowd following, while three men, with a small arsenal at command, formed themselves into a guard to prevent the escape of the prisoner. The strongest place in the diggings being a tent, they strengthened it, and were about to form a stronghold of it, when they chanced to recollect that the "grocery" to which the jury had adjourned, was a strong log building, with several apartments besides that in which poor whisky and a few "notions" were sold.

It was situated some half a mile from the scene of trial, in a low valley, where several roads branched into different parts of the mountains.

In half an hour the guards, with the prisoner, had reached it, secured an apartment, a bottle of whisky, and a general feeling of jollity and good humor with all save the man in their custody.

It is not easy to imagine or describe the apprehension which weighed upon the latter. At first he felt strong hopes that his friends would succeed in winning over the more bloodthirsty, but when he learned that they were well supplied with whisky, and that one or two had already retracted, and declared him guilty, the last hope fled. Nothing now seemed before him but a hasty and violent death, for he felt very sure that the utmost rigor of the law, as applied by the miners, would be visited upon him.

Toward sunset, a party of men entered, and conducted Rodney to the open air. Instinctively he felt that something had been decided upon. Those who stood around were singularly silent, and eyed him with curious glances.

He looked around, and there, beneath a large oak, he saw a motley group standing awaiting his arrival! Yes, it was evident now. The fates had been against him, and he was to be sacrificed!

With a strange choking sensation, his heart seemed springing into his mouth. For a moment he gasped painfully, as though each breath would be the last. Then he tried to subdue the emotion, and calm himself to meet his fate with fortitude. In this he was partially successful, and though his heart beat with a strange flutter, he was externally calm when he stood beneath the heavy arm of the oak.

"Rodney Drew said the before mentioned lawyer, with a wild wave of his hand, "after the proof we have of your terrible crime, we can not longer allow you to prey upon your fellow-men. But before sending you from this world, we will give you an opportunity to repair the wrong you have done, in so far as may be. You can tell this poor German where his gold may be found."

"Once more I tell you I am innocent," said Rodney. "I know nothing of Hoefenmark's gold. Did I know, it would be very easy to tell him."

"Then you won't own up? Bring on the rope, boys. We can't dwell."

In obedience to the request, a rope was brought forward by two of the men, and thrown over the limb above the doomed man's head. His arms and feet were bound securely, and the noose adjusted about his neck! The loose end of the rope was then fastened to a sapling near, and the spokesman of the party said:

"We'll give ye ten minutes to think it over in, and say yer prayers. If ye conclude to tell us where the gold is, we may let ye live till another mornin'. If not, why up ye go, in jest ten minutes from now."

He turned and walked away, followed by the crowd. At a respectable distance they paused, and threw themselves upon the grass in groups, awaiting the expiration of the stipulated time.

Left alone, with the fatal noose about his neck the young man endured ten ages of agony in those fatal moments.

But the moments expired at length, and the horde of would-be executioners approached again.

"Come, what hev ye got ter say?" demanded the foremost.

Rodney did not reply on the moment, for he knew not what to say. He could only repeat his innocence, and entreat for mercy.

"Don't talk that kind o' talk; that won't do it," was the heartless rejoinder. "You've had a fair trial, and the look is ag'in' ye. Now, ef you're a mind tew own up, we'll be easy on ye. If ye ain't, ye'll swing right off. We hain't any time ter waste. This thing must be finished up, so that we kin go to diggin' in the mornin'."

"I can only tell you that I am innocent," urged Drew. "Should the gold ever be found, you will have the pleasant satisfaction of having murdered an innocent man."

"There, we've heard enough of *that*! Up with him!" shouted the disciple of Blackstone, before referred to.

"Up with him!" chorused the whole retinue of half-drunken miners.

Three or four of the strongest men advanced, unwound the rope, and began slowly to draw it over the limb.

Rodney felt the fatal cord tightening, and doubted not that his end was at hand. Commending himself to God, and mentally praying for strength to endure the last great ordeal, he felt himself lifted from the earth!

For some moments he was held suspended, and then dropped to the ground again.

"Now what've ye got to say?" one of the tormentors asked.

"Only that I am innocent," he gasped, when able to whisper the words.

"Then up ye go ag'in'."

In accordance with the suggestion the rope was drawn again, and this time he was held up till all was dark around him. Though not utterly senseless, it was some minutes after he was let down before full consciousness returned. When he was really able to comprehend all, the same question was asked again.

"Now will ye tell us whar the gold is?"

"Fiends!" he whispered, when breath returned, "if you really mean to murder me, why do you not do it, and not add torture to it? I have told you times enough that I know nothing of it."

"Var ish mein golt?" demanded Carl Hoefenmark, rushing forward and brandishing his fists, as Rodney was again drawn heavenward.

This time Drew was utterly insensible when the rope was slackened, and sunk to the earth devoid of life or motion. But a hasty examination showed that he still lived, and with much celerity of movement four men raised the senseless body and hastened back to the grocery.

Here he was placed in the room from which he had been removed, while the torturers repaired to the bar and indulged in copious draughts of the fiery liquid which was dealt forth from behind the reeking counter. The result of which was that a quarrel speedily arose, knives were drawn, and in the row which followed, one of the miners was killed, and another badly cut.

But such an occurrence was no rare thing, even in that grocery. The blood was sanded over, the dead and wounded removed, and then events flowed in their usual quiet manner.

CHAPTER IV.

A WOMAN'S HAND.

FOR a long time Rodney Drew was conscious of a dim existence, a mere fact of being; but whether on earth or in another world, he knew not. Gradually the feeling came upon him that he had passed the last great change, and was, in reality, an inhabitant of another world. The fact that he was conscious of existence, though without sight, feeling, or apparent bodily incumbrance, seemed proof that he was born into another sphere.

No great length of time elapsed before divers pains began to rack the young man's frame; in fact, that was the first assurance he had that earth was near and heaven far. The ordeal of awakening to conscious existence was a painful one. He groaned and writhed in agony as the suspended functions of his bodily nature began to resume their operations.

The first thing of which he was sensible was the angry muttering of his drunken guard, who stood over him, leaning upon his rifle. Drew ceased moaning at once, and the sentinel threw himself upon a chair some distance away. When the young man sufficiently recovered to take in the surroundings, he raised himself slightly and gazed about. The prospect was not cheering, neither was it particularly disheartening.

It was night. This fact was attested by a candle, sitting upon the floor, a little distance away. Upon a rude stool, nearly beside the flickering light, sat a guard, half drunk, leaning heavily upon his rifle. Rodney fell back with a heavy groan.

An hour passed, and save a feeling of pain about his neck, Rodney had quite recovered. His head ached still, and he felt completely cramped from the uncomfortable position in which he lay. The guard had dozed for a while, sitting upon the stool, and then walked

to the only door leading from the apartment. Against this he placed his back, and composed himself for a sound sleep.

Now, for the first time, the prisoner began to think seriously of attempting to escape. Why should he stay and allow a drunken horde of excited miners to murder him, when he was utterly innocent of the charge preferred against him?

Of the opportunities of escape, provided his arms were free, he knew little or nothing. There was the door, blocked by the heavy body of the drunken guard, and two small windows, mere holes cut in the logs which formed the walls. The first task, however, would be to free his arms, and that he at once set about. The cords were well secured, and his efforts only seemed to draw them tighter.

While pausing, almost in despair, with his eyes resting upon a small closet clumsily partitioned off in one corner of the apartment, he was startled at seeing the canvas-door swing open a trifle, as though it was done by the wind. In the feeble rays of the candle it was easy to imagine this the work of some friend, wishing to lend assistance, or of an enemy stealing in to observe.

"Only the wind," he mused, and turned his efforts again toward his own liberation.

Just then came a sound, resembling the rustling of garments; the door swung open again, a human face peeped out. It was the face of a woman!

Astonished, Drew waited for what was to follow. The woman glided across the floor, stooped down and seized the candle, then retreated as quickly and noiselessly as she came.

What the meaning of such a visitation could be, Rodney had no idea. He felt quite certain that in the woman he had recognized the daughter of the grocery-keeper. But, what should send her upon such a mission? Was the candle taken away that he might be slain in his sleep? He did not think she would play such a part.

The mystery was speedily solved. Within five minutes he heard something moving near him, and presently a gentle hand was placed upon his shoulder.

"Your guard is asleep?" he was asked, in a low whisper.

"Yes."

"Then wait."

A hand passed down his arm, pausing at the wrist, and soon the cords were cut loose. Then those upon the ankles followed.

"You can walk?"

"Yes."

"Then come to that closet in a few moments. Move very carefully, so as not to disturb any one."

With these words the strange visitor stole away, and a low rustle told the young man when she reached the retreat spoken of. Getting upon his hands and knees, he moved very cautiously in the same direction.

He reached the closet in safety, pulled aside the door, and entered. The interior was partially illuminated by the candle, which had been placed upon a beam high above his head. There was an opening in the floor, a foot or two lower,

leading into the loft. The maiden had paused, and silently pointed upward.

Rodney understood the signal, and climbed up as speedily as he was able, in perfect silence. But the attempt to move after he reached the floor above came very near betraying him. The floor being made of loose boards, when he stepped upon it, creaked woefully.

"Sh!" came up in a low tone of caution from the maiden, who was rapidly ascending to the same level.

Drew paused in his tracks, and soon she was beside him, holding the lighted candle.

"Now follow me," she whispered. "Step carefully, and be sure that you don't make any noise."

Treading carefully in her steps, he at length gained the other side of the loft, when he found the heroic maiden preparing to pass through a narrow opening from which a ladder led to the ground beneath. Seeing him safely beside her, she extinguished the candle, throwing it far out upon the ground. Then she paused and listened attentively.

"All is still," she whispered, while the tumult below proclaimed that they were directly over the bar-room. "I will descend this ladder. When I am safely down, do you follow, and join me at the corner of that barn. There I'll tell you what has induced me to act as I have."

She passed out at the opening, and soon reached the ground. Then like a spirit of darkness she glided away into the gloom. Satisfied that she was safe, Rodney followed.

He was not long in reaching the designated place of rendezvous, and here his fair guide was awaiting him.

"Now you are safe," she said, in a low tone, "if you take good care of yourself. Here are your weapons, rifle, revolver, knife, everything that was taken from your person."

An exclamation of satisfaction and wonder broke from his lips as he grasped those familiar weapons.

"How did you get these?" he asked.

"Never mind," was the quiet reply. "I have means of accomplishing my ends that every one may not know. I am the daughter of a man who has not so high a sense of honor as I could wish. I know who robbed the German of his gold, and that it was not you. Neither was it taken from his tent. This is the reason that I would not leave you there. Only to save the life of an innocent man would I reveal what I know upon the subject. If any way existed to save him *without* revealing the guilty man, I should do it, as you see. The jury, so called, will decide you guilty, being urged thereto by whisky and gold dust. Then search will be made for you. Take good care that they do not find you. I shall never see you again. Do not lose any time; you are in great danger. Farewell!"

Rodney put out his hand to detain her, but she was gone. In the darkness she had left him as the last word was spoken. Realizing the preciousness of time, and thankful for the kindness which had saved him from a dreadful fate, now that he was unable to thank his savior, Rodney muttered blessings upon her head, and

turned his face toward the dark, majestic pile of Pike's Peak.

It was time to move. Lights were flitting about the grocery, and voices, loud and excited, convinced him that his escape was discovered. He had not been in the mines a long time, and did not know that in such cases the person is generally sought after very little. In fact, a desperado, once outside the confines of his prison, is seldom molested again, unless he make himself offensive by his presence or actions. Rodney was firmly impressed with the belief that he should be most ardently searched for, and reasoned accordingly. He therefore determined to head for the camp of the Centurys, under whose protecting care he would be safe, for a while at least.

The way proved intolerably rough, and not till near the close of the succeeding day did he reach the vicinity of the hut where he had lain for a week almost helpless.

His heart grew light, and he was repeating mentally the words with which the elder and younger Century should be greeted. It was strange, however, that the low roof of the cabin did not appear. He was certainly approaching the spot, and in a few moments would be close upon it.

Imagine his surprise when he gazed only upon a pile of charred ruins!

The cabin had been destroyed by fire! The possibilities which flashed across the young man's mind were numerous, and some of them anything but pleasant.

Anxious to investigate as thoroughly as possible, he turned to visit the place where they had been digging.

On reaching the spot, he beheld a strange man bending at the little stream, washing a panful of earth.

"Ah, I see! They have been driven away by robbers," he mentally exclaimed. "Perhaps I had better retreat."

He grasped the lock of his rifle, and looked around quickly, to assure himself that he had not already set foot in a trap. Evidently his presence was discovered at the moment, for when he looked again, the miner stood with a raised rifle in his hand.

"Rodney, is that you or your ghost?" he demanded, as their gazes met.

"George Dayton, as I'm alive!" the other exclaimed, rushing down the slope.

They met and grasped each other by the hand, warmly.

"Heavens! Rodney; where did you come from?" demanded Dayton. "I supposed they had hung you."

"And so they would have done if it hadn't been for that daring little Maggie Brown. She let me out, and here I am!"

"Hurrah for her! Rodney, if I was goin' to marry, and nobody was in my way, I'd marry that girl."

He glanced meaningfully at Drew.

"Nothing of that kind between us, my dear fellow; no tender passion. She knew who had the gold, and couldn't bear to see a man hung who was not guilty."

"Wal, I declare! that's about the kind, ain't it, Rod?"

"Well, it is. But say, George, how came you here?"

"You see, I thought they were bound to kill ye, and I knowed ye was innercent. I knew ye never tuk the Dutcher's gold, and so I told 'em. Wal, I talked it so strong that some of 'em got mad, and kind o' flung out that if 'twan't you 'twas me. I felt mad enough to shoot the critters; but I see the idea was takin' root as I left. I came to this place, and concluded to dig awhile."

"Where are the men who lived in that hut yonder?"

"I hain't seen anybody. The way I come to find this place was by follerin' tracks. I've found things enough to work with, got me up a bough shanty, and mean to get rich."

"Strange what could have become of the Centurys," mused Rodney.

"Sentrys! Wal, they had a strange enough name. What of 'em?"

In reply, Rodney related what had befallen him when prospecting in that region, and the proposition which they had made to him.

"Strange enough what has become of 'em," said Drayton. "But I'm squatter here now, and I'll make you the same offer they did. Come down to my tent. We'll have supper, and talk it over more at our leisure."

CHAPTER V.

"GIT!"

LUTHER, or "Lute" Cook, as he was universally known, was very nearly what he had declared himself to Rodney Drew to be—a born hunter. At least his passion for gunning had been the great one of his life, leading him to neglect all things of prior moment in the great battle of life, that he might wander the woods over, rifle in hand. But for this peculiar trait in his character, this story of mining life never would have been written. Rodney Drew would have been slain by the bear he had wounded, and the train of events which followed would have been greatly varied.

Not this alone, but the incidents of the present chapter would have turned upon a different point, and the balance of the story would have assumed a far different phase.

It was the day following Rodney's return toward Cobble Run. Pete Century and his son were in the diggings, busily engaged in unearthing the precious metal which would furnish the former with means to return again to excitement and crime. Lute, as usual, was prowling about with his rifle, on the watch for any game that he might dispose of so as to bring in a supply of ammunition and whisky.

"I've got forty bullets yet," he muttered, stopping in a nook and counting them. "Plenty of powder for every one of them, too. Before them are gone I'll make a strike. Then for a fresh supply, and a glorious old drunk! That's all I can afford, a good spree once a month, and be civil the rest of the time. Hello! what's up now?"

He rose and passed cautiously along through the thicket, keeping his eyes upon some Indians who were descending a ravine, something like a quarter of a mile away. Their manner, gliding and stealthy, was such as to awaken suspicion,

That they were after no good, the experienced wood-ranger knew, and to follow and watch them was his instant determination.

After traveling some distance, they left the ravine, passed across the ridge upon which Lute was operating, and commenced to descend the one upon his left. Easily accommodating himself to the change, the wary hunter followed them, until the valley in which Century was located was reached.

Here they paused, having caught a glimpse of the hut, and reconnoitered carefully. Apparently satisfied that no one was inside, they approached, and soon entered in a body. What their object might be, Cook did not know.

After having been inside some time, the majority of them returned to the open air, and soon discovered the trail leading to the diggings. At the moment when they started to follow it up, a curl of smoke came from the open door of the cabin.

Lute was alarmed, and justly enough. The manner of the savages made it evident that they meant to murder all whom they encountered. There were nearly twenty in the band, and most of them were armed with guns; entirely too many for the three white men to fight, unless forced to do so.

He was somewhat nearer to his friends than the Indians, and fairly flew over the ground in his zeal to reach them before his warning should be too late. As he crashed down the side of the gulch, he startled the two miners, who hastily left the spot in obedience to his gestures.

"Pick up yer tools and quit this place!" he exclaimed, when near enough to use speech. "The cussed red-skins are comin'! They've sot yer cabin afire!"

"How many of them?" asked Century.

"Too many for us tew fight. Here," he exclaimed, quickly, drawing them by the force of his manner rather than by reason, "come up here, where we can watch their movements."

They ascended a sharp bluff, and crept behind some large rocks, just as the foremost of the savages came in sight.

The Indians, on reaching the place, were not long in discovering that it had been recently occupied. Indeed, the fresh earth, just disturbed, was soon discovered by their restless eyes. Their manner, after making this discovery, left no doubt in regard to their murderous designs.

Holding their rifles ready for instant discharge, they crept about, looking for any further traces, and peeping into any place where it was possible for a man to be hidden.

Finding nothing, their eyes began to rove over the neighboring hills.

"We'll have to git out of this," suggested Lute, "or they'll nose us out."

He had scarcely made the observation, when he was saluted by a shot from the band, the ball striking far short of its mark.

"Ha! they've spied us. Git up and be dustin', afore they make it too hot for us."

It was easy enough to elude the eyesight of the savages, by keeping behind the large rocks which abounded, and, as the white men had about fifty rods in starting, there were hopes that they might succeed in throwing the Indians off the trail.

"We'd better turn toward some of the other diggin's," said Pete Century, as they descended a slight slope into a valley. "If they should once get us treed up here, all creation couldn't be of any help to us."

"All right," said Lute, "only ye must give 'em a good space before ye try to turn, or they'll cross-cut ye."

They climbed the succeeding hight, fearing each moment that their enemies would espy them before they could reach the top. Those fears were well founded.

Almost at the moment when they began to flatter themselves that they were safe, an Indian head appeared upon the swell behind them, and Indian lungs gave utterance to a whoop of infernal delight at beholding the fleeing whites. Still the distance between them was not diminished, but rather increased. This gave hope to the fugitives, almost counterbalancing the dissatisfaction at discovery.

"Go on, I'll stop here a minute, and fool the red-skins!" exclaimed Lute, facing about and resting his rifle against a tree. As the others moved away he added to himself: "I'll teach 'em a lesson. One thing's sart'in, there'll be one less arter this old beauty has talked tew 'em."

He waited for some moments, while the savages, who had not observed the movement, drew nearer. At length he lowered it, and moved away, musing as he rapidly regained the ground he had lost:

"If 'twasn't for *that* I'd do it. But it may be best, because they'd never give it up if one o' their lot was killed. Now they may get tired of it in a little while."

Upon regaining his companions he glanced back. Unmistakably the Indians were gaining. Nor was this all.

Before the party lay an intensely rough mountainous region. To climb it faster than at a walk evidently was next to impossible. To turn to the right, which would hardly better the matter, would be to turn directly away from all civilization, and enter more deeply the haunts of the men they were trying to escape. To the left, back toward the diggings, they could not turn, since their pursuers were so near and so scattered that they would inevitably be cut off. Under these disadvantages, they had no alternative but to ascend, and up they went.

The Indians, on reaching the base of this ascent, were within rifle-shot, and such as had guns banged away on arriving at the foot of the mountain. The bullets cut about the fleeing trio too near for comfortable feeling, but not near enough to harm. Instead of paying attention to them, the party continued to scramble up the rocky ascent. The savages, stopped to fire and then to reload, which feat they could not well perform while climbing, were soon of gunshot behind. A few, however, who had not guns, or who had failed to fire, still kept their distance, and were rather gaining upon the fugitives.

Cook's quick eye saw that the proper moment for action had come. Wheeling, he took aim at a brawny Indian and fired. Though slain, the savage was disabled, and stretched howling upon the ground. His fall seemed to operate as a sort of check upon the remainder

who waited for the rest of the party to come up. This gave the white men a slight gain, but it did not last long, and soon the balls were flying through the forest about them closer than before.

Nearer came the Indians, who were now distinguishable as a prowling band of Utes. The utmost efforts of the white men were put forth, but all to no avail.

"I'm afraid it's no use," said Cook, pressing in between the others. "We shall hev to put all our chances on a fair fight with 'em."

"Then let's do it now," said Pele Century. "They're gittin' a heap too near for comfort."

The party faced about and presented rifles. The movement checked the impulsive savages, who well knew the deadly power of such weapons. The foremost sprung behind such trees and shrubs as promised partial protection, while those in the rear crouched low, waiting for the expected volley.

But no volley was given. Seeing the effect produced by their feint, the three whites wheeled quickly and continued their flight.

At this moment Lute's feet struck a narrow trail, and after a quick glance about, he exclaimed, with fresh energy:

"Boys, we're all right! I know this 'ere track, and thar's jest a nice den not a quarter of a mile away. Go in on yer muscle, and we'll fool the conceited skunks yet!"

He indicated the direction he should take, then leveled his rifle and fired at the approaching Indians. One of their number fell, the others gave a shout and let fly several arrows at the bold marksman. But all the party seemed to bear a charmed life, and in a few moments he was beside his less fleet comrades.

He had barely succeeded in reloading his rifle, when he pointed into theicket, and turned the Centurys short in that direction. For a moment they were somewhat surprised at this movement, as a blank ledge rose not fifty yards in front of them, which it was impossible for the foot of man to scale. At they had no time to ask questions.

Cook took the lead, pushing his way through the bushes, and soon paused before the wall of rock. His companions were close at hand, while the savages were somewhat confused at suddenly losing all traces of those they had leulated upon as being almost within their paches.

An emphatic exclamation broke from the lips of Cook, as he came to a stop. Full before him, the floor of the ledge, and nearly concealing an erture among the rocks, but little larger than an's body, sat a large black bear. Contrary to the usual custom of his kind, the animal showed no intention of moving, but sat sullenly at they coming the intruders.

There was no time to lose. The stern hunter fired his rifle within a foot of the beast's head, still he fired. The smoke rolled away in a moment, losing Bruin a lifeless mass upon the ground.

Keep yer guns p'inted, and look out for In- till I tell ye ready," said Cook, as he crawled sward into the dark orifice spoken of, seizing ear by the hind legs as he did so.

There was a short struggle, when man and disappeared within the bosom of the rock. At the same moment, two or three of the

nearest savages reached the spot, but drew back again to wait for reinforcements, as they saw two rifles bearing upon them.

"All right. Come in!" shouted the voice of Cook, just as the red-men began to gather.

"Go in, Charles," said the elder Century, in a tone which admitted of no denial.

The young man complied, and in a moment shouted for his father to follow. But the latter had need of all his skill, coupled with the persuasive arguments of his rifle, to escape the infuriated savages. As he stooped to enter the chasm, they rushed forward. One fell before his rifle, but the lance assailed him with arrows and tomahawks, one of the latter striking his head and almost stunning him. But strong hands grasped and drew him in, before the furious Utes could follow up their momentary advantage.

"We're safe, now, for the present," said Cook. "Let 'em howl and shoot till they're better satisfied. Their bullets won't do any hurt."

The party was now in a large chamber, formed by the hand of nature in the solid mass of rock. The entrance was three or four feet above the floor, which seemed quite regular and smooth. Upon either hand the apartment stretched away for several feet; in fact, its extent was uncertain, as no ray of light ever entered there save such as came through the narrow opening, which barely served to make the darkness visible.

"This is a great, gloomy place," said Charles; "are you quite sure the Utes cannot gain entrance?"

"They can't git in any other way than what we come, and we must be pesky fools to let 'em in thar."

"You speak as though acquainted with the place."

"Yis, I've been here more nor once before. I karkilate when I've been in a place two or three times, I know about all thar is to know of it."

"I'll warn ye to keep out o' range of this mouth, though," he added, a moment later. "These pesky Utes 'll be firin' in here more or less till we larn 'em better, and they might make bad work with a feller."

But nothing was heard of the Indians for some time, and faint hopes began to be felt that they had given up the pursuit. Of course they knew the retreat of the white men, so that their silence could not come from ignorance.

This interval of quietude was employed by the party within in resting after their fatigue, and discussing their situation.

"It ain't likely the critters 'll stay around here many days," said Cook, in conclusion. "They never was knowed to hang to one thing long. It's most mighty fortinit this b'ar sot thar as he did, or we shouldn't hev had anything to eat. Now we've got plenty of meat and plenty of ammunition, so that the red-skins are welcome to do their biggest."

Just as he ceased speaking there was a darkening of the doorway, and in a moment there came the report of a musket, almost deafening those within the cave. The sulphurous smoke which rolled in, too, was far from pleasant.

"Jest wait till they try that infernal caper ag'in," said Cook. "I'll fix 'em."

He had not long to wait, for almost simultaneously with the last words, a brace of reports followed, the leaden messengers crashing against the rocky walls with impotent force. At the same moment Lute gave utterance to a sharp cry, and rolled upon the ground, uttering groans which seemed wrung from him by the pains of dissolution. Even his companions felt uncertain as to the reality of his outcries.

There was a stillness without, then the sound of Indian voices, and a dusky face was detected, attempting to peer in. Instantly there came the report of Lute's pistol, and the cry which followed from without was no sham. Two or three muskets were fired, through the opening, but they did no harm, merely calling forth a shout of derision from those within the cavern.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLD "BANK."

THE day which succeeded the meeting of Rodney Drew and George Dayton, was spent by the young men in digging and washing gold. It proved a day of rich harvest to them. They struck a vein of unusual richness, even for that place, and the yield was greater than answered their most sanguine expectations.

Until four o'clock in the afternoon they toiled without cessation, gathering up handful after handful of the metal-loaded soil. Then they paused from work, quite exhausted.

"We have gathered gold enough for one day," said George. "Let us rest. A week of such washing will make us both rich men."

"Rich enough to leave this region, I hope," returned Rodney. "I shall never feel safe here, and yet I can't tear myself away poorer than when I came."

"I don't apprehend that you are in the least danger," replied George. "I have been here longer than you, and I have mixed with all classes more. I never knew a man pursued who had once escaped, even if he had been proven guilty. The fact is, those who have any energy are too intent on getting rich to spend their time and money in hunting down enemies."

"I'll tell you what I'd rather like to do," remarked Rodney, after a pause of some moments. "That is to visit the burned cabin. I feel certain we can determine pretty nearly whether the Centurys were driven off, went away peaceably, or were killed."

Taking their weapons, the young men moved down toward the cabin site.

Every thing lay as it had fallen. Not a brand had been disturbed. Rodney lifted one or two half-consumed logs which lay in his way, and began to stir the ashes and cinders with his feet.

"Near this spot," he said, after a short examination, "is the place where the Centurys deposited their gold. They had an ingenious contrivance for hiding it, so that I much doubt if any one, not acquainted with the secret, could find it. If the gold be left here I shall reason that they were murdered, because if still alive they would certainly return for the treasure."

After careful inspection he settled upon a section of the earth-floor covered by a large log, partially buried, and held in place by several others.

"I am quite certain it is exactly below *here*!" he said, after scanning the bearings again. "I think I can dig under the logs from this side, which will be easier than to remove them. Let me try it. Here is a sharpened stick; just the thing."

But he did not find the dirt, hardened by much travel, and then well baked, very easy to dig. It was like gutta-percha in color, hardness and tenacity. Still he worked with much energy, and finally succeeded in reaching the "bank."

This was, at length, fully uncovered, and an earthen pot, set in the ground, disclosed to view. Inside of it was a quantity of dirt, and two small leather sacks! Each was heavy, and when opened they were found to be nearly full of the finest gold!

"So, the gold is here," remarked Rodney, in sad tones. "We may consider our worst fears verified!"

"Very likely—more than likely," replied George, sadly regarding the supposed fatal treasure. "What'll we do with this gold? It won't be safe leaving it here any longer."

"We'd better take it with us. The owners probably never'll come this way again. If they should, and need gold, we'll be glad to return it to them. If not, we'll keep it."

"Unless we can find who the owners were, and where their relatives live," he would have added, but for an interruption.

"Ha, my hearties, we caught ye right in the act! *Now* what've ye got to say?" demanded a gruff voice, and a tall form sprung in upon them.

Both looked up in surprise, and both uttered the name of the intruder in the same breath.

"Jake Dodge!"

Rodney Drew, so absorbed had he been by what engaged his attention, had almost forgotten himself. His first emotion at seeing Dodge was one of pure surprise. He had quite forgotten that person's active part in his former arrest. He had quite forgotten that Dodge had never seemed quite his friend at heart, though always coolly so in externals.

A moment later saw the ruins swarming with men, and then the two friends began to realize that they had been caught in a very suspicious situation. Before they were aware of what was intended, their rifles were seized, and revolvers presented at their heads. Although they might have tried flight, with sufficient notice, they would never have resisted, unless to save their lives.

"Surrender quietly, or I'll blow your brains out!" was Jake's second remark.

No resistance was made, and very soon they were bound and disarmed.

"Now, will you tell us what all this means?" demanded Dayton, fixing a keen glance upon his officious captor.

"Too bad ye don't know," was the contemptuous reply. "But we'll give you good bail that ye'll find out when we git ye to Cobble Run."

"Vat for yous shteal mein golt?" asked Carl Höfenmark, who formed one of the party.

"Neither of us ever touched your gold, you stupid dolt," angrily responded George.

"Dis isht mein!" said Carl raising one of the sacks,

"Not by any means," said Rodney, who felt alarmed, now that he realized how strong the case was going to appear against him. "That gold belongs to Pete Century, or his son, if either of them are alive!"

"Dat isht mein golt!" declared Carl, this time with more vehemence. "May be you shteat it from me undt sell it him, eh?"

"You liar! You never saw it before. That belongs to the Centurys."

The irritated German had learned enough of life in the mines to feel that no man should call him a liar. The pistol which hung at his belt was instantly in his hand, and would have been used, had not Jake Dodge restrained him.

"No shootin', Carl," he said, in very persuasive tones. "If you should kill one of 'em you couldn't hev the satisfaction of seein' 'em swing."

"Dat's so!" the enlightened Bavarian exclaimed, replacing his weapons and exhausting his stock of English in abusive epithets addressed to the prisoners.

A consultation now followed as to the course to be pursued. The capturing party had traveled all that day, searching the mountains over for traces of the men they had now secured. Consequently they scarcely liked the idea of tramping back nearly ten miles, after dark, over a region with which they were but indifferently acquainted. It was thought best, however, to do so, as some of the party feared that the supposed robbers might have accomplices, who would attempt to rescue them before morning.

It was almost dark before they were ready to seth forth. Carl had been allowed to claim and possess one of the bags of gold, and whether the wily German really fancied that it had ever before been his property, he certainly considered possession nine points or, more of the law in the present case.

It was a long, hard march back to Cobble Run, and not till near daybreak did the weary party reach their temporary homes. The prisoners were then locked up in a room which had no extra openings, while the men who had been so zealous in their capture retired for a few hours' rest.

Left to themselves, Rodney and his friend had an opportunity to review their situation at length.

"It all lays with *her*," finally said George Dayton. "If she comes forward and declares who *did* steal the gold, we may get free."

"I think she will do that to save our lives," returned Rodney. "But it must be some of her friends, and quite possibly they will see that she is kept out of the way. Then, too, she may feel differently when the moment of action comes."

"Don't know about that," interrupted George, rather quickly. "I know her pretty well, and if she'd let them fellers hang me when she could save my life, I'm most plaguily mistaken, that's all. Gosh! if she did that I'd *haunt* her, blame me if I wouldn't."

Quite exhausted the two young men at length dropped off in sleep, but ere long were aroused by the tramping of feet. They started up at the same time, and beheld several of the miners who had brought them there. All were armed, and their looks were severe and menacing.

"Come on!" said one, grasping George by the arm, while others seized Rodney. "We want tew find out what we kin about you fellers. Now don't go to showin' off any of yer fine pranks, acause if ye do it'll be a sorry day for ye."

Realizing that the turning point of their lives was at hand, and calling to their aid all possible firmness, they allowed themselves to be led quietly forth to trial.

CHAPTER VII.

MAGGIE BROWN.

THE "bar-room" of the grocery, as the principal apartment was called, was filled to its greatest capacity. News that two robbers had been captured, and were to be hung after a brief trial, had spread rapidly, and almost every moment new arrivals took place, and next to them the jury were arranged.

We need not dwell upon the form of trial which ensued. In all respects it was *but* a form, and when it was ended, the jury consulted for a few moments, without leaving their places. When it was over, the foreman, who was the half-fledged lawyer spoken of in the previous chapter, arose to his feet, saying:

"Stand up, you fellers, and hear the finding of the jury."

The prisoners arose to their feet, and with a pompous flourish the self-appointed judge proceeded:

"Rodney Drew, and you, George Dayton, the verdict of this jury is that you are *guilty*!"

A murmur of mingled emotion arose from the crowd, who pressed nearer with great interest. Believers and disbelievers in the guilt of the parties accused were there, but their feelings were held in check to catch the remaining words of the speaker. The latter at once proceeded:

"The *sentence* is, that you be kept in close custody till to-morrow, at the hour of noon, when you be taken forth to the most convenient place, and then hanged by the neck till you are both dead!"

A mingled murmur of voices filled the room, and soon it appeared that the few friends of the prisoners were almost determined to interfere in the matter.

Before any crisis was reached, however, sounds of voices and commotion at the lower end of the apartment drew general attention in that direction.

"Open the way, gentlemen; I must pass," said the voice of a woman. "Those men are innocent; I can prove it! Please make way before the jury leaves its sitting."

"It's Maggie Brown," whispered George, his face brightening as he heard the tones. "I knew she would be here. I wonder she is so late."

The jury were, in fact, upon the point of leaving their seats, when the words we have recorded came to their ears. Curiosity, if no stronger sensation, kept them in their places till Miss Brown, exhausted by the exertions she had made, gained a standing in front of them.

"One moment, gentlemen," she said, casting an appealing look at those she addressed. "Hear what I have to say."

"What is it, Miss Brown?" asked the foreman.

"These men are innocent," she replied, firmly.

"How is it that you didn't come and tell us, when the rest of the witnesses were testifying?"

"I was detained, sirs."

"Who detained you?"

"I need not tell that; it doesn't concern the guilt of these men."

"Well, go on, and tell us what you *know*; mind, let there be no guess-work about it."

The poor girl paused for a moment, as if to gather strength. In truth, it was no slight task she had undertaken. Well she knew that it was to bring upon her head a terrible storm of wrath. Nothing but the noblest passion which earth knows induced her to face the storm in order to save her lover—for such, in reality, George Dayton was, though no words to that effect had passed between them.

"Come, tell us what you have got to say," pursued the foreman, after a short silence. "You ought to be ready with your story by this time, unless it is to be made up."

There was something in the manner of the speaker which called forth more than one threat from those in listening, but the maiden paid no attention to it. In a clear voice, and without hesitation, she proceeded to relate the facts.

"There are tables in one of the rooms of this building, where those who feel so disposed take a game of cards—frequently, I may say generally, staking a large quantity of gold upon the issue. On the night when the German lost his dust, he was in that room, playing and drinking till eleven o'clock."

"How do you know?"

"Because I saw him there frequently, and saw him leave the house at the time named."

"Well, go on."

"In a few minutes he returned, and being in an adjoining apartment, with but a thin partition between, I heard what passed. It seemed the German had staked and lost all before he left the place. Now he returned with a second sack of gold-dust, and dared any one to play with him for all they had. He did not seem to realize that there was but a single man in the room, and that man was not in a mood for play. Instead, he plied Hoefenmark with whisky, until he was so drunk as scarcely to be able to stand. He then represented to the German that he must leave or he would be locked up. With much ado the drunken wretch took himself away, utterly forgetting his gold, which the other man pocketed at once."

"Can you prove this? Who was the other man?"

"Dexter Robbins."

"That's a lie!" shouted a voice from the crowd.

"Hold your tongue," was the reply. "You will have a chance to tell your story soon enough."

Threats and persuasions finally induced the boisterous fellow to maintain silence, while a few questions were asked of Maggie. She gave answer to them in a straightforward manner, and when her testimony was concluded, the general public feeling was undergoing a change.

The miners were not thirsting for the blood of Drew and Dayton in an especial manner. Feeling that these men had basely robbed one

of their number of gold which he had toiled to earn, they were anxious that such a black crime should be punished. Now that another was thus implicated, all desired the matter thoroughly sifted, in order that the really guilty one might be discovered and brought to punishment.

"Come, Robbins," shouted the mouthpiece of the jury, "we want to hear what you have got to say for yourself. This is a pretty serious charge that Miss Brown has laid on you."

"I've heard it."

"What have you to say?"

"It's all a confounded lie! She trumped up that story jest because George Dayton had a hand in the robbery. I never saw Hoefenmark that night after he and the rest went away. He wasn't in the grocery at all after eleven o'clock. After she has helped the prisoner to get away once so nice, I shouldn't think her stories would amount to much with you."

"It was in my power to expose you then," said Maggie, calmly, "but I did not do it. I wanted to save an innocent man's life, and but for the fact of another trial you would not have been exposed."

"So you own up you helped Drew to get away three or four days since."

"I did, and I have no wish to deny it."

The afternoon was nearly worn away before the matter had been fully canvassed in its new bearings. Many irreproachable men were called in by Dexter Robbins to sustain the points of his testimony, but none to strengthen that of Maggie Brown. As a consequence she was entirely discomfited, and those who had been favorable to her version of the story at first, were compelled to admit that love for George must have prompted the efforts to save him from such a cruel fate.

"Young men," said the disciple of Blackstone, after announcing that the former decision of the jury was to stand, "we pity you. But for the unsettled state of our society we would give you a chance to reform. Had we a prison, you should be safely placed in it. We can only, therefore, satisfied as we are of your guilt, consign you to the halter, trusting that the example will be a good one for the society. You will have the night and forenoon for preparations."

"As for you, young lady," he continued, turning to the desponding, stricken Maggie, "let me advise you to be careful how you interfere again with the working of justice, or it may be too much for us to overlook, even in one so fair as yourself."

The maiden moved away slowly, the prisoners were taken back to the room from which they came, and the crowd quietly dispersed. Robbins and his companions, however, remained at the bar drinking for some time.

"You needn't pay anything for this," said Rufus Brown, the father of Maggie, as the young man pulled out a handful of dust. "Let this go for the hurt the jade's done ye. I'll pay her off for that, and pay her well, too. She needn't go to bein' sick an' upstart right under my own ruff."

On being placed once more in the apartment from which they had been taken for trial, every hope seemed to desert the doomed ones. They had fully expected the revelations of Maggie

Brown, when made, would be accepted as proof positive of the guilt of another party. Not only was the result different from their expectations, but the last hope was thus taken away.

"I'm afeard it's all up with us this time," said George, when they were together, with none present but the guard.

"There is hope until they swing us," bitterly returned Rodney. "But, I'll own the state of things don't look very flattering."

"But what a brave little thing Maggie is," pursued George, warming with the subject. "Robbins and his lyin' pack didn't flinch her a single hair. The rascal! How I'll pay him for that if I ever get a chance!"

"Hope we never shall come across him if we should happen to get free again."

"Why so, Rodney?"

"Oh, because somebody would be likely to get hurt; though I don't think he stands in much danger from us just at this particular time. Still, I'd rather be where I am than in his place."

"Don't know about that, Drew. I'd be mighty glad to live and marry Maggie; now that's true as you live. I tell you she's a jewel of a girl. You can't get any good words but what'll fit her."

Talking of such matters as doomed men would feel most interest in, the twain finally grew sleepy, and one after the other fell into forgetfulness.

Both were awakened some time later by the noise attendant upon the changing of guards. The new sentry walked across the room several times, whistling loudly, and marking time with his step so decidedly that any such thing as getting asleep very soon was out of the question.

In a few minutes he approached the prisoners and began shaking them soundly by the shoulders.

"Say, go 'way, can't ye, and leave us in quiet?" demanded George, in a not very amiable tone. "You ain't obliged to keep us awake, if you are awake yourself."

"Hold yer noise," commanded the guard, as he began to fumble about their hands and feet. "I want to see yer tyin'."

He pulled them about much more than was necessary, muttering as he did so:

"You've got away once, and this time I want to make sure of ye. Seems to me jest as though ye'd get loose, some way, jump up and knock me down when I wasn't lookin', take my rifle and traps for yer own use, and slip out by the back door afore I come to so's to give and alarm."

There was something peculiar in the man's tone, as well as his movements. Both the young men noticed it, and they began to hope again. The manner of the man seemed to indicate that he was really their friend.

"I don't see but you are safe for the present," he muttered. "I've jist felt o' yer cords, and find 'em all strong. Still, it seems to me as though one of ye'd spring onto me when I turned my back this way, and clear out jest as I said."

He turned away as he thus spoke, and his words seemed prophetic, for at the instant George Dayton sprung to his feet, and felled the guard to the ground by a blow.

"Keep still," he whispered, in the prostrate man's ear. "Don't go to makin' any fuss; ef ye do I'll blow yer brains out."

Noticing that the man spoke not, George bent nearer, and saw that he lay without motion or apparent life. Hastily grasping his rifle, which stood within arm's length, he relieved the prostrate guard of such other weapons and ammunition as he possessed. By this time Rodney Drew had risen to his feet, and together they stole from the apartment.

To account for this sudden metamorphose, we will say that the guard had managed to cut every cord which confined the prisoners, and, while pulling them about, had really quite liberated them. He had, of course, expected one of them to strike him, and, after the light blow was given, fell to the floor and lay in a feigned state of insensibility till after their departure.

Losing no time, the fugitives glided through the adjacent hall and out at the back door. How cool and pure the air felt! Truly, they had come forth from death to life.

As they passed the barn, which was built at a little distance from the grocery, there was a slight movement, and their escape seemed about to be discovered. Both were quickly reassured, however, at the sound of a sweet voice, which asked in low, soft accents:

"George, is that you?"

"Bless you, Maggie," exclaimed the individual addressed, "this is some of your work. I suspected as much, but wasn't certain of it."

"Do not speak of it at present," the maiden urged; "I might be troubled if they should know that I had helped you again."

"Bless your dear heart, they never shall know of it. We'll die first. I wish—but no matter. I shall come back here again some time, and then—"

The balance of the sentence was spoken so low that Rodney did not hear it. He could guess, however, as to its import.

"Maybe so," was Maggie's reply. "But you must not lose any more time. Have you any weapons?"

"We have; a rifle, revolver and knife, which we took from the guard."

"That is not enough. Here is another rifle and revolver. Take them and go now, for I fear you have not much time to spare."

She pressed the weapons into the hand of Drew, who was thus far unarmed, and motioned them away.

At the moment a heavy step sounded close upon them, but George heard it in time to be prepared for action.

"Consarn it all, what ye prowlin' round the barn for, this time of night? Why don't ye go home and sleep?" asked the gruff voice of the intruder.

He might have expected an answer, but it is very certain that he never heard it. A rifle-stock descended with no gentle force upon his head, and he dropped to the ground.

"Take care of yourself, never fear for us," exclaimed George, as he grasped Maggie's hand for a moment.

He would have said more, but at that instant another person appeared upon the scene at no

great distance. This was none other than Rufus Brown, the father of Maggie.

"Ha, Mag, that's you, is it?" he exclaimed, in gruff tones. "I thought likely, for I seen ye was gone from yer room. Nice work that for a gal o' mine. I'll pay ye!" and he advanced, with a pistol raised, gleaming coldly in the moonlight.

"Take that!" he exclaimed, discharging a barrel of the weapon, though fortunately without any effect.

Before he could repeat the experiment, Rodney had rushed upon him and dashed him to the ground with a blow from his rifle.

"Oh, what shall I do? I shall be killed!" gasped Maggie, wringing her hands in agony.

"No, you'll not be killed, or anything of the kind!" exclaimed Rodney, seeing that George did not speak. "Come with us. We'll take care of you, and see that no harm comes to you."

"Certainly; by all means," added George, now that his tongue seemed loosened. "We'll protect you. You shall be my wife; then I'll have a right to take you with me anywhere."

The alarm was spreading, and they hastened away with all possible speed, managing to avoid the startled sleepers who were gathering from different quarters with an air of idle curiosity.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WILDERNESS RETREAT.

It was not far to a wagon-road, which could have been followed easily and rapidly, but it was considered so unsafe to make the attempt that it was crossed, and the party took to the open country beyond. Here the walking was very difficult for a number of reasons.

The pale starlight merely served to render the darkness visible. The way was filled with every kind of obstructions, full of gullies, ravines, bushes and fallen trees.

For Maggie the flight was peculiarly distressing. Already her clothing was being torn, and she had no other to claim as her own. The haste of her departure had left her utterly destitute of change. Still, she did not mourn or complain, but pressed bravely onward to keep pace with her conductors. For two hours the struggle was kept up, and then, utterly wearied by her exertions, she sunk upon the ground as the young men paused for a moment.

"You must go on and leave me," she said, as they paused over her. "I fear I cannot go any further to-night. I did not think I was such a weak thing!"

"Guess not," returned George. "We've gone far enough for safety. So we'll rest here till daylight, and then travel again."

"But, I shall endanger you by my own foolish weakness," pleaded the maiden. "We cannot have traveled far, and—"

"Every bit of five miles. We're just as safe here as anywhere, and what if we weren't? We should have been hung to-morrow noon, if it hadn't been for you."

"And I should have been killed, I have no doubt, at once, had you not taken me with you. So I am sure I am still the debtor."

"Not a bit of it. But let me find a place

where you can rest well, and then we will see that no harm comes to you till daylight."

He moved about in the thicket, for they had begun to ascend the mountains, and soon found a sheltered spot beneath some low, thick-spreading pines, where the dews and winds could not reach the brave fair one. True, they had no couch for her, nor any blanket for a covering; but these disagreeable facts they atoned for, in so far as possible, by plucking a quantity of the soft pine-boughs which they spread upon the ground.

The weary maiden was pleased beyond measure by these marks of attention, and softer than a couch of down seemed the bed of boughs as she rested upon it.

Since nothing would be at all likely to disturb her repose, the young men retired to a little distance and threw themselves upon the bare earth. Neither of them felt the least inclination to sleep. The events of the night had been too exciting, and their present position was one of such imminent moment, that they felt rather like watching and planning for the future.

"What are we going to do now that we've got so far?" asked George. "No doubt we can get into the mountains far enough to be out of danger, but what then? We can't live there very long, not as we are now. We might seek the settlements, but there Brown would be more likely to come across us, though there'd be little matter about that, if it wasn't for the bad name he'd give us."

"Well, we'll consider that in the morning. Of course we shall want to give Maggie her say in the matter, since she is quite as much interested as either of us. But, there is one thing I shall say: I am going back to the Century diggings again."

"Will it be safe?"

"As safe there as anywhere. Besides, we've nearly if not quite a thousand dollars' worth of dust in that old cabin—perhaps more than that. We cannot afford to lose that, if we have to leave. And, if it be practicable, I would like to dig there a few days longer."

"For my part," said George, "I am satisfied to get back to the States again. I'll take Maggie, and ten to one we can content ourselves with any honorable business, so that we can live in peace."

"You have the advantage of me," said Rodney, with a light laugh. "I've nobody to settle down with, and no chance of finding anybody in as romantic a way as you are doing."

"There's as many strange things to happen as ever did happen," asserted George. "You may fall in with a daughter of the noble red-man, or some wild half-breed with an inborn longing for the beauties of civilization."

For hours the young men conversed thus in whispers, now desponding and anxious, and then forgetting in a momentary jest the perils which surrounded them. As day approached, Rodney finally dropped asleep, and George paced back and forth through the thicket, keeping watch lest any evil should befall those under his care.

With the coming of light Maggie emerged from her retreat, and approached her lover with a glad smile.

"Well, dear, how have you passed the night?" asked George.

"Oh, finely, finely indeed!" was the joyful reply. "Nothing could be nicer than such a resting-place. My sleep was very sweet, and I feel strong enough now."

Just at that moment Rodney Drew appeared. He too felt much refreshed by the sleep which had visited him, and was as delighted at the cheerful appearance of Maggie as George could possibly be.

"There is one thing to settle at once," he remarked: "what we shall do and which way we shall go?"

"True. We would have settled it last night, but we wanted to know your wishes," said Dayton, addressing himself to Maggie.

"As though I could have any wish, save to reach some place of safety," the maiden returned, quickly. "My all is with you, and I wish you to do just what seems best for all of us, or for yourselves. I have no home, nothing in the world to claim as my own."

"But you must have some wish, some preference."

"None in the world save to go with you, and have you care for me. Even that I have no right to ask."

"No right to ask! You have a right to command us, for you have saved our lives. We owe everything to you."

"And I repeat that you have well paid all debts. Do as seems best to you, and I will only be too happy to follow your fortunes."

The young men then consulted together, and as George had no objection, it was finally decided to carry out Rodney's wish in regard to revisiting the place where their dust was left.

"Off to the south of that place," he said, "the mountains are high and wild. Of course they never would suspect that we had gone to any such place. There we can remain secluded, while I go down to the diggings, get our gold, if nobody has found it, and bring it up."

Now that it was daylight they were able to shape their course so that they met few obstructions, while taking care to keep at a good distance from any moving camp of miners.

Some two or three miles on their way Rodney shot a brace of game birds, which were broiled over a small fire, and furnished a palatable morning meal, of which all partook heartily. This done, the party pursued their way once more.

Upon reaching the brow of a considerable elevation, they paused, and cautioning Maggie to keep well out of sight, in order that no chance observer might espy the unusual sight of a woman in such a place, they proceeded to make a survey of their position.

Their first thought, of course, was in regard to pursuit, and they gazed long and eagerly back in the direction whence they had come. They could see no moving forms, however, and though this fact did not clearly prove that none were in pursuit, it gave them a stronger feeling of security.

They then turned to the wild region which lay before them, and where they must make a temporary home. Rodney studied the place for a time, and then spoke:

"You see that sink yonder," he said, pointing to a lonely-looking region, two or three miles away. "In there is Century Gulch, where we left a quantity of yellow dust. That long, sharp ridge, rising away to the left, can't be much further away than the gulch. On that, or about it, I feel certain we can find a hiding-place for our headquarters, where we can keep ourselves out of the way, and get what gold we have already dug. When that is done we can cut over southeast, strike the stage route, and then do as we think best about going back to the States. What say?"

"That looks well enough. I've no fault to find. Pick out your route and let's be goin'."

What seemed to be the most promising route was accordingly selected, and the party moved forward, Rodney going on in advance to make sure they would meet no obstruction.

In this manner they traveled till the vicinity of the mountain-side was reached. Believing themselves to be quite safe and secure from all human interference, they now paused for a short period of rest.

Still they did not care to delay long, and when they were in a measure composed again, they continued the ascent, now quite steep.

Winding upward and toward the left, they finally reached a rough, rocky ravine, which evidently had been, at some former time, the bed of a mountain torrent. It was a secluded place, far from all appearance of habitation, and desolate in the extreme. For these very reasons it seemed to the party just the place they had been seeking. Therefore the young men set about constructing a temporary dwelling place, in the shape of a bough cabin.

"That'll do very well," at length remarked Rodney. "Now I'll go out and shoot something for dinner, while you stay and stand guard."

"Very well. But be careful about your firin', Rodney; you know we've every thing at stake now."

"Of course I sha'n't shoot around in this vicinity. If I shouldn't be back when you look for me, now or any other time, don't be at all alarmed. If I don't come back in a good while you can take care of Maggie, and make up your mind that all isn't just right with me."

Using every caution to remain under cover, he descended for some distance, seeing no signs of life around him. The pursuit seemingly had been baffled. But hark! That was a human shout. Then he heard the scattering discharge of half a dozen rifles, apparently from the very spot where he had left his companions!

His heart leaped into his throat. A dreadful fear seemed to seize him. Could it be that they had been followed and discovered so soon?

With a mind too intensely agitated to think, he hastened back up the ravine. Nearing the retreat, the first object which met his eye, was George standing with rifle in hand.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE "DEN."

ONE or two more shots were delivered by the defenders, not wholly without effect, it seemed.

The Utes now retreated a distance, and for some time nothing was heard from them.

Although bloodthirsty as ever, they were quite at a loss how to wreak their intended vengeance upon the white men. There seemed to be but that one passage-way to the cavern, and this was a harder road than they cared to travel.

Leaving a sufficient force to guard the opening, so that their victims might not escape them, the rest of the party commenced to search for any other passage by which they might accomplish the desired result.

Their search occupied the balance of the day, and when night came they bivouacked before the entrance of the cave, feeling that it was merely a question of time in regard to the destruction of the white men.

Meanwhile the situation of the defenders was at least peculiar. Gathering from the manner of the Indians that they would not leave the place for some time, the besieged turned their attention to making themselves as secure and as comfortable as possible. In the first place they realized that the entrance must be watched every moment by a man well prepared for any demonstration the savages might make.

To accomplish this, each man in turn was to watch three hours.

Charles Century, after a little hesitation, consented to accept the situation first, and, after having seen him well posted, Cook and the elder Century started upon a mission similar to that which occupied the Indians outside.

"Ye see I've been here afore," the former remarked, as they moved away into the darkness. "I got caught in a mighty nasty storm, and when it had lasted about a day, I made my home in here—staid till it was over, three or four days longer. By that time I'd got quite well fitted up, as you'll see when I git a light. I've been here once or twice since, though I'm a leetle scary about sich places, onless thar's some need o' gittin' into 'em."

While delivering himself of these remarks, Cook had been fumbling about, and soon lighted a pine-knot, the blaze of which revealed to Pete Century something he was far from anticipating.

All about them lay the evidences of former habitation and present adaptability for use. Just before them was a pile of fagots, gathered long before, yet still in a good state of preservation. There were two or three more pine-knots, and at a little distance was a pile of ashes—the remains of a fire long since burned out.

Somewhat further away, and just discernible by the torchlight, was the couch of boughs, which had lain undisturbed since the occupant left.

"I don't think thar's any other place whar we kin git out, or they kin git in tew us," said Cook, "acause I looked all round once. But, it'll not dew any hurt to look ag'in. So if ye'r a mind, we'll see what kin be found."

The cave was quite irregular in form, the large room in which they first found themselves being of comparatively small extent. But, extending from it were many passages, large and small, reaching back into the bowels of the earth. Numbers of them were too small to admit a man, in any shape, and although they

might lead toward the open air, they had nothing to fear or hope from the fact.

Into all the larger ones they penetrated, but uniformly to meet with disappointment. No opening, no ray of light appeared to cheer them. After some time they reached what seemed to be the main gallery, and which extended back further than any of the others. At the extremity it was closed by a curtain of rock, in which was an opening barely large enough to admit the passage of a single person.

"Ho, ho, here's suthin' extra," exclaimed Cook. "This wa'n't here when I was livin' hereabouts. Maybe thar's suthin' beyond it. Shall we go an' see?"

"Go, of course; for I ain't ashamed to tell ye I'd rayther not stay here a great while, if thar's any better way."

"Nor I, Pete, as for the matter o' that," replied Cook.

He poked his torch through the opening, following it closely with a pistol, and when satisfied that nothing confronted him upon the other side he passed through boldly. Pete Century, who was a larger man, had some difficulty in following, actually sticking fast midway in the passage till assisted by his friend.

Still their search did not seem to meet with any great degree of success. There was a single apartment, high enough for a man to stand upright, and terminating some twenty feet away. It was a damp, muddy place, and seemed subject to occasional deluge.

"Water must git in here somehow," pursued Cook, looking about.

He was unable to find any place where it made its entrance, and in pursuit of that object hastened up toward the terminus of the cavern.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed. "This is where it comes from!"

The appearance of the slimy rock, over which he was obliged to crawl, gave him the assurance that it came from this part of the cavern.

Century followed, quite as impatient to know the facts of the case as his comrade. After crawling and struggling as far as they could penetrate between the upper and nether millstones they were forced to endure another disappointment.

There was a slight opening, one leading to the outer world, without doubt, for the cool air came in thereat. But it was so far away that they could not reach it, and even if gained, it evidently was not larger than a man's arm.

"It's all up! We may as well go back and see what has become of Charley, poor feller," muttered the father, and without a word they turned.

"We've got to settle down to it, an' stan' regular siege," said Cook, after relating to the young man their want of success. "We may well make up our minds to that thing. See, the young man ain't much tired yet, so you may as well help me skin this bear, Peter."

"None o' yer Peterin' me!" exclaimed Century, somewhat savagely. "I'm jest Pete, an' not a bit more."

"And I'm jest Lute. Wal, so 'tis. I know folks what'll put half a dozen names onto a yot one. Lord! No wonder the little things die."

in the big cities. They have names enuff tew kill 'em."

By this time the men had become so accustomed to the dim light of the place that they were able to work without a torch, and in this manner they proceeded to skin and dress the bear which Cook had shot.

"Now then," that individual exclaimed, standing erect after the work was done, "we may as well cook up a lot o' this meat, acause it don't keep long without. We won't let the red varmints starve us to death."

"I should like some water, as well as any one thing," remarked Charles Century, who had overheard the last remark.

"Yis; whar we goin' tew git it?" demanded the father.

"That's so, by thunder!" exclaimed Cook. "Thar ain't a pesky drop tew be had for lovenor money! What in nater we goin' to dew?"

For a time no one spoke. The very thought that they were imprisoned in the bowels of the earth, where not a drop of water could be obtained, was in itself so fearful that all further efforts seemed of no avail. At length Cook broke the worse than silence.

"We can live some time without any," he said, in as cheerful tones as the occasion would permit. "I've done it for three days on a pinch, and most likely in less time'n that the pesky redskius'll leave us to our own destruction."

"I s'pose we kin live," muttered Pete, "but it won't be very nice. If we had water, I shouldn't call this sich a bad place arter all. I never could bear chokin' for want o' suthin' to drink."

"Still, we can't help it, father," said Charles, "so let's make the best of it, and not parch our throats in useless ado over it."

"Spoken like a brave man!" said Cook, with hearty admiration. "You'll make a fine trapper, my lad. I begin to think there's more grit to you, now, than there is to all the rest of us."

It was not a great task to build a fire out of the materials which the cavern contained, and Cook at once set himself to preparing some of the steaks. Of the meat thus prepared all the party ate more or less heartily, though the savor was somewhat neutralized by the reflection that they could not obtain a drop of drink until the savages should see fit to depart.

It was almost night. The light from without was growing dimmer momentarily. Charles had been off guard for some time, but instead of seeking sleep at once, he waited near Lute, as though there was something he desired to say.

"You don't suppose it would do any good to go out into that other part, and see if we could find some little puddle that one could drink from?" he asked, at length, with some hesitation.

The old trapper looked down into the youth's eyes for a few moments, and then he replied:

"I'm afeard not, my boy. But it won't do t'ing. S'ry hurt to try. Wait till I light this pine knot, yet, so you'll see what there is. I wasn't lookin' for water when we's there, but for out doors. Possibly there's a puddle there big enuff tew drink from."

They passed through the narrow opening, and commenced a search not less earnest than which had followed the discovery of the

The result was different.

Before they had proceeded many feet, Charles caught his companion by the arm, and exclaimed:

"Hark! Don't you hear the gurgling of water? I am sure I do!"

Cook listened, supposing it a mere fancy of his companion, but soon a look of eager anticipation spread over his features.

"There is water here, I hear it run!" he exclaimed, pressing toward the spot whence the sound seemed to issue.

Charles was holding the torch at the moment, and he was first in reaching the place. Under a low ledge of the upper rock there was what seemed a natural sink, but which, upon closer inspection, proved to be a hole in the solid rock. Six inches beneath the surface a subterranean stream of water went rushing on its way, doubtless to some outlet further down the mountain. But, whatever its source, or where its destination, there it flowed, like a stream from the rock of old.

"God be thanked!" exclaimed Charles, bending over and peering into the bubbling liquid.

"You don't suppose he has anything to do with it, do you?" Cook asked.

The old hunter was not quite an atheist, and yet there had been times when he really doubted if there could be any great and good being who ruled the universe and still allowed sin and misery to exist as they did.

"'Tis very certain that this is the work of no mortal being!" Charles returned.

"That's true," rejoined Cook.

Then, throwing himself upon the damp rock, he took a hearty draught of the refreshing water, drinking in therewith a purer and stronger faith than he had ever known before.

A small flask, which he usually carried, was then filled, and they returned to where Pete Century was keeping watch.

"Seems we're all right now," that individual remarked, with a string of oaths, after draining the flask. "Let the red niggers work; we'll fool 'em, if it takes ten years tew do it. I'm bound for Denver again."

The vulgar and profane words of the speaker disgusted Cook. He felt, for the moment, a purer, better being than ever before. With no more words than civility required, he moved away, and seated himself near the fading embers of the fire.

"Charles," he said, as the young man took a seat near him, "there's one thing certain, between us two; I'm goin' tew be a better man than I have for the past years of my life."

"I trust you will, Lute," the youth responded, warmly. "There is room for all of us to do better if we're a mind to. And I am sure there must be more satisfaction in a good life than in one which accomplishes nothing in that direction."

"You're right, Charley; you are always right. I'm goin' tew begin from to-day, and stop usin' bad language. That'll be one good step, and then others'll come easier."

"I wish you all success."

Thus the twain talked for some time. It was a happy night to Lute Cook. He never before had felt so good as he did now.

After a time Charles threw himself upon the old couch of boughs to sleep, and soon afterward Cook took up his station before the entrance, to keep watch over the movements without.

Three, four hours passed. The time of Charles's watch was passing, and still the young man did not awake.

"Let him sleep," mused the sentry to himself. "I'm an old hoss, used tew all these things, and he ain't. I sha'n't wake him up, not to watch Injins here in the dark, by a long shot."

Not until morning light was beginning to dawn, and faint tinges of gray were to be seen through the opening before him, did Cook leave his post to Century, quietly telling the latter that he had stood Charley's watch, and bidding that the young man be not disturbed till he should waken naturally.

CHAPTER X.

WHO IS THERE?

GRATIFIED to find that his friends were not in immediate danger, yet quite as much mystified as before in regard to the cause of alarm, Rodney Drew pressed onward, and soon stood by the side of his companion.

"What is the trouble, George?" he asked, in a whisper.

"I don't know. Just around the hill there, somebody has been firing and shouting; several of them, I should say, by the noise."

They waited and listened for a few moments, when one or two more scattering shots were heard.

"Rodney, just stay here with Maggie," said George, "while I run up and see what the matter is. Maybe somethin' we'd like to know of."

And with these words he glided away, scrambling up the rocky sides of the ravine.

"I suppose we had better keep out of sight as much as possible while he is gone," remarked Rodney, leading the way back to the bush cabin.

He could not seclude himself utterly, however, and soon he was without, listening and watching for any signs and sounds to indicate the peril of his friend. Just then two or three more shots were fired, but no commotion followed, and Rodney felt that his friend was not yet discovered.

While he was still waiting, Maggie came up behind, and touched him upon the arm, saying, as she did so:

"It seems to me there is something a little singular here. Come with me a moment!"

The young man followed her into the hut, considering what could be the matter. Upon two sides the walls were formed of rock and earth, while the remaining sides and cover had been formed of bushes. Down in the corner, where the two walls of rock met, Maggie pointed, and as Rodney bent over the place, she said:

"I was sitting here, just in this way, when what should I hear but the sound of guns. It didn't seem to come from overhead, but up through this crevice. It sounded very strangely to me, and when I bent nearer I could plainly smell the fumes of burnt powder."

"Yes, you are right in that, for I can smell it now," added Drew. "What can it be?"

"I have no idea. Probably George may learn before he comes back."

"But it may not be safe for us to stay here. What this can mean I do not know. There may be danger. If men are there they must have entered from some other way. Nobody could have gone in here."

He procured a short pole, and introduced it at the fissure. There were evidences of a large cavern beyond, but he paused from making any further explorations.

"Nobody knows who the men may be in there," he said, starting with a sudden thought. "If it should be a robber band I had better not stir them up with this stick."

"Oh, gracious heavens! You don't suppose it is?" demanded Maggie, turning pale with horror. "If it is so, and George should fall into their hands—"

"Never mind him!" exclaimed a voice behind them, the subject of their conversation having entered unnoticed.

"Oh, it is you, George," exclaimed the maiden, with a tone of happy relief. "I really began to be frightened. Tell us what you have seen?"

"Well, it's a party of Injins, jest over that bend. They've driv suthin' intew a cave around there, near as I can see, and seem to have rather a lively time with it. Whether it's men or animals I couldn't exactly make out."

"Then we must be in danger," said Maggie. "Why not leave this fearful place at once?"

"We had better go, I think," returned Dayton. "Possibly there may not be any danger, even if the Indians were to discover us. But, they are not especially friendly, and we had better look for a safer place."

This was the opinion of all, and as they had no preparations to make, they were not long detained. Up and away they went, tramping through the wilderness for more than a mile before they thought it safe to pause again. In a dark, shady dell, inclosed on all sides by scrubby pines, seemed a safe retreat, and here they rested their weary feet.

It was not much work to construct another hut, and soon the four walls were defined, the tops of convenient trees served for roof, and the dwelling was completed.

But they had nothing to eat, and it seemed dangerous to attempt getting a supply of food by the ordinary means. Still, Rodney was willing to make the attempt, and soon departed, taking such a direction as should bear him further away from the Indians.

Game was plenty, and a couple of well-aimed shots supplied their temporary wants. Returning to the "camp," he threw down the game, remarking:

"You must cook this up to suit yourselves; I'm going out prospecting."

"Which way, and how long to be gone?" asked the others.

"I can't tell. Don't trouble yourself for me," was the careless reply, and with that he was gone.

The truth was, a suspicion had crossed Rodney's mind—a suspicion only too near the truth. And this was the train of his thought:

George had reported the Indians as having "holed" either men or animals. As it was not probable that they would spend much time with the latter, it was very reasonable that some

party of white men might have taken refuge there. If so, who more likely than the Centurys?

They were missing, their dwelling had been burned, and the gold left. This certainly looked like the work of Indians. The cave was not far from the place where they had been mining, not further than a party might have fled with the Indians in pursuit.

Taking all these facts together, Rodney became more decided each moment in the faith that his friends were confined in the bowels of the mountain. Of their resources or situation, if there, he had no means to judge.

Revolving in his mind a thousand impossible schemes for helping his friends, should they prove to be there, he approached the place. He was higher than the mouth of the cavern, and the undergrowth was thick, so that with moderate care there was little danger of discovery.

All was still as he approached. The scout began to feel that, after all, the Indians had only driven a bear into the rocks, and either killed it or gone their way without. But this idea soon vanished. A faint curl of smoke was rising from below the ledge, and the savor of roasting meat came to the young man's nostrils.

He was some time in gaining a point from which he could safely espy the camp, but finally succeeded. The sight which met his eyes was not cheering. More than a dozen red-men were squatted about the feeble fire, some of them engaged in cooking, some eating, but more lying upon the ground, idly watching the entrance to the mountain refuge, if such it was.

A few minutes' observation convinced Rodney that they were keenly alive to the presence of some persons, whom they feared as well as hated. None of the braves ventured to pass in front of the opening, and while the young man looked, one of them raised his rifle and fired a harmless shot. It was not responded to, though, from the crouching of the savages, it seemed they feared as much.

Satisfied upon one of the main points, it only remained for Rodney to observe how, if at all, he might be of assistance to the besieged party. He recollected well the fact which Maggie had discovered, and felt certain that the narrow rift connected with the cavern. From this fact he reasoned that it must be a large one.

It cost some time and much caution to gain the hut of bushes, which he found undisturbed.

The young man listened. He could hear nothing. The sulphury vapor no longer rose from the opening, and he began to feel that he might be mistaken, after all. His first thought was to attract the attention of those within by the rattling of a stick, but feeling that this would be more likely to draw a bullet than any other response, he applied his mouth to the opening, and gently whispered the names of the supposed occupants.

All continued silent. Looking about to see that no prowling Indian was near, he repeated the summons, louder and louder. All to no purpose, however. Then a fear began to assail him. What if those he sought to assist had fallen by the chance bullets of the savages? He knew nothing of the inner structure of the cavern. Perchance his efforts were all too late.

But hark! What is that? It sounds like some person moving over the rocks below. Again he applied his mouth to the opening, and repeated his call. There was an instant of silence, and then a cautious—

"Hullo! What's that? Who's thar?"

Oh joy! Rodney fairly bounded with delight. The voice was that of a white man, and sounded familiar, though he could not quite recognize it.

"A white man and friend. Who are you?"

"Wal, my particular name is Luke Cook. What may your handle be?"

"Rodney Drew."

"What! the feller 't fit the grizzly? How are ye, and what ye doin' here?"

"I'm all right. Who's with ye, and how come ye her?"

"Old Century and his boy are here, and the Injins driv us to it. That's about all I can tell ye."

Satisfied upon the more important points, a general canvass took place between the two, Rodney keeping watch that no straggling Utes approached him unperceived.

"Keep up courage a bit longer," said the young man, at parting. "I must hasten back to George, and if any way can be contrived to do it, you shall be released. If in no other way, we can bring men enough to aid you. So hold on till you hear from us again."

Easy as the task might seem, it was not in reality so trifling a matter for Rodney to find his way back to the place where his companions had been left. The shades of evening were already gathering; in fact, it was quite dusky before he left the vicinity of the cave, and it was some time before he found his friends.

"Well, what news?" asked George, when the wanderer was safely inside the hut.

"None ~~very~~ good," replied Rodney.

"Such as what?"

"Pete Century and his son, and the old hunter who saved me from the grizzly's paws, are all in that cavern, besieged by the savages. They have been there four days."

"Gracious! can it be?"

"It is so."

"What's to be done?"

"We must help them out."

"How?"

"That's to be seen. I said *we* must do it. I mean *I* must. Of course they haven't the claims up on you they have upon me. You don't know any of them, while some or all of the three saved my life. I never should forgive myself if I spared any possible exertions for their succor."

"That ain't what I mean, Rodney. I'm goin' tew help ye, but I want to know how we can do it. You've been there, and know somethin' of the prospect."

The person addressed related what had transpired, in substance, during his absence, his discoveries at their first cabin, and gave it as his conviction that a large stone which seemed to be quite loose at the opening, but against which no force could be applied by those within, could be moved by the united efforts of two men. This would open a way for those within to pass out unobserved. With the wide forest before

them, and under cover of darkness especially, they could have no difficulty in taking care of themselves.

"Wal, that looks reasonable," said George, after his companion had concluded. "I'm willin' to go and help ye carry it out. I suppose to-night will be the time."

"Yes. Don't let us delay any longer than will be necessary. If the Indians come across the place, all our hopes will go for nothing."

"That's a fact. Well, here, eat a bit of meat, while I go out and get a couple of stout sticks to work with."

Rodney did as desired, for he was really very hungry. By the time his appetite was satisfied, George had returned with the articles in question.

"Now we are all ready," he said. "But here is Maggie."

"Yes, what shall I do?" the maiden said.

"Why, stay here, I suppose. Hadn't she better, Rodney?"

"I had rather go with you," she pleaded, though not earnestly. "Still, I will do what you think for the best."

"Then we'll leave it to Rodney."

The person named hesitated. He knew the unpleasant situation of Maggie, if left alone where she then was. Only the fear that they might have trouble with the savages, induced him to urge her to remain.

Maggie accepted with a good grace, though when they were gone she crept back into the hut, and crouched in one corner, starting and trembling with fear at every move of leaf or limb. Never had she been so utterly alone.

CHAPTER XI.

OPEN AND SHUT.

STRIKING the ravine some distance below the place of operations, they stole up, and finally gained the shelter of the bush cabin. Here they were quite safe from discovery, and, what planning was required to be done, was quietly accomplished.

"See here, Rodney," exclaimed George, as they prepared for the task, "wouldn't it be as well to go over and see if the Injins ain't gone, afore we work much? I half suspect the rascals have got tired of waiting, and are gone. What do you think?"

"Guess you'll find 'em there, though. I'll go over and see, if you have any doubts."

"No, not you, Rodney. You've tramped enough to-night. Stay here and rest, while I go and take an observation."

Finding that he was really anxious to go, Rodney directed him in the course to take, advised him to be very careful, and then seated himself upon a stone, to await the result.

George Dayton was not much practiced in Indian matters. He had never been brought in contact with the natives before, although he had seen more or less, of a friendly character, in and about the mines. Under these circumstances he felt that no great skill would be required to move about a camp of sleeping savages, with perhaps one keeping watch at the mouth of the cave.

Regarding caution as much as possible, and following the route indicated by Rodney, he was

not long in coming within sight of the Indian camp. A faint fire was glowing, so shaded that its light should not be seen any distance, and around this the savages were gathered. A few were sleeping, but so few that George was quite taken by surprise. Still he wished to see more of the situation, and fancying it no especially difficult task to reach the very presence of the Indians undetected, he began moving forward.

For a few yards he succeeded well, and began to fancy himself a born scout; but a slight mishap was sufficient to put another appearance to the matter.

As he carefully placed one foot in advance of the other, feeling his way up, he felt something hard in the place where he intended to step. Resting upon it, whatever it might be seemed firm, and he prepared for another advance.

Suddenly there was a sharp crack, his foot dropped, and he came to the ground in a confused pile. For a moment he dared not stir. Discovery and death seemed inevitable. The savages heard the sound, and were already starting to their feet to discover the cause of it.

To remain inactive would certainly be tempting his fate. This much the young man realized, and acting upon the thought he started up, and fled from the place. Fortunately this movement was noiseless, so that even the keen ears of the savages heard nothing. Had they done so his fate would have been sealed.

Creeping through the bushes, and springing across such open spaces as presented, George was soon within a few yards of the place where his companion had been left. Here he paused for a little time, to learn what course the savages were pursuing. As all seemed quiet, he felt no doubt they had given up the search, and gone back to their genial fire.

Sliding down the bank of the ravine, he found Rodney anxiously awaiting him, with everything arranged for work.

"What luck? You found them there, I fancy," the latter said, as his companion re-entered the bush hut.

"Yes, they're there, and I stirred 'em up a little; but they've settled down ag'in, seemin' they couldn't find anything."

"How did you do it?"

George related the manner in which he had so nearly spoiled the night's work, and when he had finished, his companion rejoined:

"Let's not lose any time, then, in getting to work. It's possible they may be on the lookout for you yet. They are shrewd fellows, in such a matter. They are all ready below to come up, and I think we have only this stone to turn over to open the way. I can move it, alone."

The two applied themselves resolutely to the task, but, decided as their efforts were, just so decidedly were they of little avail. The stone was half raised, and there it became fast, utterly refusing to be moved any further. A sharp point caught in the rocks, and no amount of force or skill could dislodge it.

After a time they succeeded in holding and blocking the rock as far up as it could be raised. Then stepping back they stood for some moments in silence.

"Well, what'll we do now?" George asked, as the silence became painful.

"I don't see but one way," returned Rodney.

"And that—"

"Is, to break off that point!"

"'Twill make too much noise."

"Can you advise anything else? If you can, anything better, I am ready to hear it."

George stood regarding the scene in silence for some moments, but he saw no other way to secure the release of the imprisoned men.

He stated as much frankly.

"Then just hold on, while I get a stone to do it with."

A few minutes groping in that rocky place enabled him to find a boulder of the required size, and thus armed, he moved back to the place of action.

A momentary groping in the dark, then one, two, three quick blows followed. The point was broken, and the rock fell back to its place. It cost some exertion to raise it again, but that seemed nothing, for they had the satisfaction of seeing a passage open by which their imprisoned friends might move forth to liberty.

As the stone was lowered to the earth, the quick whisper, "All right!" was sent down by the deliverers, and a grunt of satisfaction from below followed. Pete Century came first, crowding his bulky frame through the opening with much difficulty, and swearing more and more fearfully with each successive breath. At length he grasped the rocks, and raised himself to his feet, exclaiming, with a long string of oaths:

"There, good-by, you confounded old hole in the ground! I've stayed there jist as long as I care about. Give us a paw, one of ye; I can't jist git my old carcass out of here."

Both the young men stepped forward to aid him, but their efforts were not required. With a hiss and a rattle something hurtled around them, falling upon every side, yet not doing the two friends any harm. Pete Century uttered a cry, however, and fell back, pierced by an Indian arrow through the body!

At the same moment, with a wild yell, firing their guns and shooting arrows, half a score of savages rushed down the side of the ravine, cutting in all directions, hoping to reach their as yet unseen foe.

George and Rodney, quite confounded at this unlooked-for interruption, knew not what to do, but Cook, who was close behind Century, and comprehended the state of affairs, shouted forth:

"Take care of yourselves, boys; we're all right."

"Draw me in quick," gasped Century. "I'm wounded. I'm afraid it's all up with me. Hurry; don't let the cusses kill me!"

His request was heeded, though in no very gentle manner, owing to the position in which he had been placed. As the Indians seemed to pay no attention to the opening, Cook proceeded to stop it as well as possible, after which he lighted a torch, and examined the hurt of the wounded man.

That it was very severe appeared at first sight, the arrow having entered his side, and passed nearly through the body. Intense pain accompanied its withdrawal, and much blood followed, though the sufferer pronounced himself easier after the first pangs had subsided,

Lute Cook, when alone, shook his head and muttered:

"Don't know about it. He might git up ag'in all right if we's away from this place; but here I'm afraid 'twill be tew much for him. He's got tew much on his mind, too. Thar's nothin' like a free conscience, whether a man wants tew live or die."

And Cook was perfectly right in his assertions.

Meanwhile George and Rodney, partially heeding the words of Cook, fell back from the immediate vicinity of the opening. In a moment they realized the fact that they were entirely cut off from rendering any further assistance to their friends, as the Indians had possession of the ravine, and were anxiously searching for those who might have left the cavern.

Indeed, they had scarcely realized this fact, when a brawny savage placed one hand upon Rodney's arm. The young man retorted by knocking the Indian down with his rifle, just one instant before the latter would have buried his hatchet in the white man's brain.

In fact, the blow was not quick enough to prevent the red-skin from giving an outcry, which brought his followers swarming to the spot.

"Run, run," whispered George. "We'll meet up thar, whar *she* is!"

And run they did, as fast as men could run, under the circumstances. The impediments to their own speed operated to some extent upon their pursuers, and the latter had the additional disadvantage that their own footfalls were so numerous as to leave them in doubt where the fleeing white men really were.

Thus far in the race the latter had kept nearly together—so near, in fact, that each knew the position of the other. Rodney was straining his ears to catch the sound of George's step, when he suddenly found himself thrown to the ground. For a moment he was stunned and confused, but soon realized that his foot had caught in the branch of a fallen tree, and had thus been precipitated to the earth.

Ere he was able to rise the Indians were so near that he could not do so in safety. Reflecting that by lying close he might escape detection, as the savages did not seem to suspect his whereabouts, and would be far from likely to make any search, he crept closer to the trunk of the fallen monarch, and almost held his breath as one of his pursuers stumbled in the same manner as himself, though without falling.

The Indians were quite scattered—a sure sign that they would not run much further that night. This gave Rodney the comforting assurance that his companion was comparatively safe, and would reach Maggie in time to allay any fears the maiden might entertain after hearing the firing.

While reflecting what course to pursue after he should set forth again, Drew lay for some time longer than he might otherwise have done, beneath the tree. Just as he was about crawling forth, there came the faint sound of footsteps upon the ground, and he hastily drew back.

Very fortunate it was that he did so. Next moment a voice broke the former stillness, that voice coming from the tongue of an Indian not more than five paces away. Nor was the

speaker alone, for another voice, with a peculiar whine, which never left Rodney's mind, replied to the first, and a third chimed in soon after.

A suspicion that they were hunting for him crossed the young man's mind, and he grasped his revolver, determined never to yield should they succeed in finding him.

But such did not appear to be their object. They passed on slowly, talking to themselves all the while in a mournful voice. Whether this was natural, or whether they were really bewailing their want of success, Rodney had no means of knowing.

No sooner had they reached a safe distance than the young man emerged from his hiding-place and moved away, as carefully as possible, for he knew not at what moment he might encounter those who had decided to return.

Thinking he had taken the nearest route to the pine thicket in which Maggie had been left, he pressed on for half an hour, looking for some familiar sign to indicate that he was approaching the spot, but nothing of the kind appeared, and after confused attempts to study out his position, the young man was forced to admit that he was lost.

Meanwhile George Dayton, having met no obstructions, had been able to distance his enemies, and finally to evade them entirely. Satisfied of the fact that he was no longer pursued, and fearing lest danger might come to Maggie, he turned toward the pine thicket.

The way was rough, extremely so, and it required a severe exertion to reach the place. But finally he did so, and approached the hut of bushes.

"She may be frightened," he thought. "I will warn her that I am a friend."

Carrying out the idea, he called her gently by name. There was no response. But he was not alarmed.

"She is sleeping," he reasoned. "I will go and see that all is right, and then wait for Rodney."

He entered the cabin very silently, and paused to catch the breathing of the loved one. All was very still, and a cold chill began to creep around the young man's heart.

"Maggie!" he called, this time using a louder tone.

There was no response, not even a whisper or movement. What could it mean? What did it mean?

Anxiously he moved around the narrow confines of the place, putting his hands in every corner. All was but vacancy! Plainly the one he sought was gone!

"Great heavens!" he gasped, while a cloud seemed to cover his brain; "what can have happened to her? Maggie, dear Maggie, where can you have gone to?"

He rushed forth into the open air, still calling the name of the lost one. Possibly she might have felt greater safety outside the tent, and fallen asleep beneath some of the pines.

His search was all in vain. Not a foot in the thicket but he penetrated to make sure that he had not been the victim of some ill fortune, and that her body was not lying there.

The fact that such was not the case was the only satisfaction he received. By the time this scrutiny had been made a new fear began to possess

him. Why did not Rodney come? Had some ill befallen him? True, he had not heard a shot since they parted, but many guns might have been fired, and death and disability might have come to the young man in many another way.

Ten—fifteen minutes, half an hour passed, and none came. Oh, why could not that pall of darkness lift for a single moment, that he might learn of his surroundings?

Suddenly he paused, and bent his ear. Surely there were steps approaching. With hope in his heart, he moved forward to meet them.

CHAPTER XII.

A STROKE FOR LIBERTY.

RODNEY DREW wandered back and forth for some time, fearful of going any great distance in one direction, lest it should take him deeper into the labyrinth than he then was. Seating himself upon a fallen tree, he began to think in regard to his best course of action.

He already had canvassed more than a dozen different projects without adopting any of them when he was electrified by hearing something very much resembling the cry of an agonized human being. Although uncertain but it might be the voice of some animal, Rodney at once left his seat and approached the spot from which the sound seemed to come.

But when no further sounds came to his ear, he began to fancy that he might have been mistaken. Perchance his somewhat excited imagination had been playing him false. Yet it was not so, for almost as the thought entered his mind, he heard it again, this time nearer, and so distinct that there could no longer be any uncertainty in the matter.

It was a human cry, the cry of distress, and the cry of a woman!

Instantly the thought of Maggie, the maiden who had saved his life, and toward whom he felt the affection of a brother, entered his brain, and with all speed he dashed toward the scene. The dim light of the stars penetrated the forest in places, and where this light served to dispel more than an ordinary share of the darkness, he saw two struggling figures.

At first he could not decide who or what they might be, save that there was one of either sex. As he came nearer, the twain espied him. The female gave utterance to a cry of gladness, while the other cast her to the earth, and prepared to meet the new comer.

Rodney saw by this movement that he had an Indian to contend with, but he was prepared. His revolver was in hand, and, as the savage raised his hatchet, the white man fired.

The red-skin was not injured, but, seeing that he was overmatched, sprung behind a tree near by. Of course this was a move of safety to him, since it was a very easy matter to keep the tree between them, let Rodney take any position that seemed most favorable to him.

Seeing the state of affairs, the latter walked to the place where the woman was just rising from the ground.

"Maggie, as I feared!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is me," she replied, rather wildly; "but you came in time to save me from that dreadful beast. Look out, look out!"

The last words were uttered with an accent of terror, and as Rodney looked around, he saw the Indian just drawing an arrow to his eye. Maggie had fallen to the ground, and he was just in time to cast himself beside her, when the shaft whistled over them.

"Here, Maggie," the young man said, pressing the revolver into her hand, "take this pistol, and if the rascal comes on this side of the tree, fire at him."

Then, taking his rifle in hand, he sprung to a point from which the savage must necessarily expose himself to one of them.

The crack of the revolver first warned the Indian that he was placed between two fires. Yet he was not injured, and started to flee through the forest.

But he was too late. The instant he left the friendly cover of the tree, a ball sped from Rodney's rifle, crashing through the savage's vitals, and bringing him to the ground to die. The white man approached carefully, for he knew there might be treachery; but a single glance reassured him. Stepping to the side of Maggie, he said, in low, calm tones, "Now for the cabin again."

They were further away from the pines than Rodney had imagined. Fully a mile they had traveled, and he was beginning to fear that Maggie was mistaken, when they entered the dark confines of the grove. Scarcely had they done so when George came forward to meet them.

"Yes, it's you, Maggie and Rodney. Where have ye been? I was very much frightened about you."

"I have been in the hands of an ugly Indian," said the maiden, "and you would have seen little more of me, if it hadn't been for this man."

"In the hands of an Injin! How did that happen? Where is he? How came he to find you?"

"Don't ask too many questions, or I shall forget some of them. As for where he is that doesn't make much odds, for he'll never hurt us any more."

"That's well; but I'm all anxiety for the rest. Tell me how you came in his hands."

"Partly through my own foolishness. But that makes no difference now, it can't be helped. I was looking for you to come back. After a time I heard some one step outside, and, though startled, I thought you had come. 'Is it you, George?' I asked, but got no answer. I supposed it all right, thinking you did not wish to speak aloud. In a moment a pair of arms were thrown around me."

"'You white-face squaw,' the creature grunted. It was an Indian! Heavens! what a shock that was! I was there in his arms, alone and helpless. I should have fainted, but my fear was too great."

"He grasped me and dragged me away. I fought and resisted all I could, but my little strength availed nothing. In this way we went for a long distance, and I was beginning to lose all hope, when I heard some one coming. It proved to be Rodney. The rest I need not tell you."

George did not say much, though he managed to express his happiness. In truth he was very

sorry that he had not been in the place of his comrade. Not that he feared Rodney would endeavor to steal away the affections of Maggie, but if he should learn to love her—and he did not see how any one could resist that feeling—and her heart should be drawn to him, he trembled to think of himself.

"How stupid I am," the maiden suddenly exclaimed. "I never thought to ask how you succeeded in setting your friends free. How selfish I am."

"We did not succeed at all," was the sad reply of George. "We got it all ready for them to come out, when the Indians surprised us, wounded one of them, and made us run."

"How unfortunate; and now what will be done?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"I know what I shall do," said Rodney firmly. "I shall go down to the mines in the morning, and raise men enough to drive away the Injins. I've undertaken this work, and I'm going through with it."

"And get hung as a robber," suggested George.

"No, I do not feel any fears of that. I shall not go to Cobble Run, of course. There is another deposit nearer which men are working pretty extensively, I hear. I shall go there, state the facts, and see if I can not get volunteers."

George was not anxious that the men in the cavern should die there, either at the hand of the savages or otherwise, and yet he very much dreaded to have his friend undertake the mission he contemplated. What arguments he could present to induce him to forego his design were given, but Rodney was firm.

"I shall go as soon as light comes," he said. "Meanwhile, I think we'd better get away from this place. The Injins have been here once, and may come again."

This was certainly a good suggestion, and they acted upon it at once, though none of the party felt disposed to travel further in the darkness than might be necessary, after the manifold events of the day and night.

They were not long in finding a place which seemed as little liable to intrusion as could be imagined, and here they remained till daybreak, though no one of the party slept, or, if at all, but very little.

They had still cold meat enough for breakfast, and this they devoured as the gray of the morning began to streak the eastern sky, and soften the harsh blackness of night. With the coming of dawn Rodney re-capped his weapons, to make sure of their condition, and then, with a hearty good-by to each of the lovers, he left them, to make one more attempt for his besieged friends.

His progress was rapid and the sun had not reached more than half-way to the zenith, when he came in view of the tents scattered about Prospect Vein. The number of tents gave him satisfaction in one respect, if not in all.

A sharp descent, a trifling rise of land, and he was among the busy miners.

"Hello, stranger, what's yer tewls?" a full-grown Down-easter demanded, while an ardent native of Cork beside him growled:

"Divil a good look'll ye find in this ould blag-

gard iv a place. It's meself is jist goin' to quit it enthirely."

"I want some help to rescue a party of men from the Indians," he said gaining a central position, where the number could hear his voice.

"What's that? Injins?" and more than one pick dropped to the ground, as the owner started forward to hear the news.

When a tolerable number had gathered, Drew detailed in brief terms the situation of Century and his companions. The account was listened to with interest, and one or two declared themselves ready to join in driving away the savages. The majority, however, were quite reserved in the expression of their views.

"Come, men, there is no time to lose," he said, after a few moments had passed. "Even now the poor men may be in great danger. Possibly we may be too late if we dally a single moment. Who will go?"

Two men stepped to his side, the Down-caster who had first greeted him, and another of the same pattern. So far the result was gratifying, and there the volunteering ended. Every one had a nominal excuse, while more than one quick look passed.

"Ye see the diggin's pay purty well jist now, and they hate to leave 'em," one of the volunteers remarked, in a low tone.

"See here," ventured Rodney, in a voice so low that none but those he addressed could hear him, "can't ye scare up a few good fellers that ye know'll be all right? I can show 'em some diggin's that'll pay an ounce where these pay a dollar, and that not five miles from here!"

"If you can dew that we'll find a plenty of men," was the quick reply.

Both of them started to confer with a friend, and Rodney remained standing there, urging those about him to join the party.

At length an individual elbowed his way through the crowd, and paused in front of the young man. The latter recognized the individual's features, and felt sure they had met before, but where he could not tell.

"See here, fellers," he exclaimed, with an important air, "don't ye know this feller? I do."

"Who is he?" a dozen voices asked.

"One of the robbers what's tried at Cobble Run two or three days ago, and got away in the night. We'll git suthin' good for takin' him back."

An intense commotion followed. In the midst of the excitement, a powerful fellow approached, and asked, in a confidential manner:

"What say you to that? Be you the chap?"

Rodney had anticipated this very thing, and he hesitated not in answering:

"I am the man."

"Then we'll take care of you. You needn't take any trouble about them fellows on the mountains. You'll go back to Cobble Run!"

And with these words the fellow grasped Rodney's arm. The latter, however, freed himself by a quick motion, and kept the assailant at bay while he said:

"Hear what I have to say. I tell you I am not guilty. Even if I were it would not be right to leave those men in the cave to die. Now, hear what I am going to say. Let enough

of you go to drive away those Indians, and I will show you the way. You can take my weapons, everything, and shoot me if I attempt to leave you. When this is done, I will return with you to Cobble Run or any other place, and prove my innocence or suffer the consequences."

"That's fair enough," remarked one.

"It sounds fair, but who knows how many confeds he's got up in the mountains? I'd sooner trust myself with the Injins a plagu / sight."

"Don't mind a word the rascal says," put in the man who had just given Rodney's history to the bystanders. "He's got away twice, by some means, and now he's plannin' tew go ag'in. I see the 'tarnal critter's idee."

"That's it," remarked the tall fellow who had attempted to seize Drew. "I go for takin' him over to Cobble Run, and they can do as they see fit about takin' a tramp onto the mountains for him."

He wrenched away the young man's rifle as he spoke, a proceeding which the latter did not resist. He knew it would be useless to do anything of the kind. Instead, he took his pistol and handed it to the half-abashed rough.

"I do not depend upon those," he said, quite calmly. "Had I been so guilt-hardened as to rob a poor man, I never should have ventured here to save the lives of my fellow-men. But I came because I trusted you, and felt that you would consider my motives. Even if I were guilty, you should not leave those poor men in the dark, miserable cavern, to die like hunted animals."

"That's true; we're jist actin' like fools," exclaimed one of the party. "Why not twenty or thirty on us go with him, and see if thar's any Injins? I'll go, for one. I don't believe he ever robbed anybody, or thought of it. Come, who'll go?"

Those who were anxious for "the job" did not appear to be numerous, and the young man's prospects began to darken a little. While reason brought a different feeling to many, and the probabilities of his guilt seemed less each moment, few among the selfish multitude cared to leave their digging to save the lives of fellow-beings. The two Yankees had succeeded in bringing to light a few others who would like to see the richer diggings, so that ten men stood ready to go. They were opposed to fifty others, who still held Rodney in decided suspicion, rather regarding them as foolish for the pains they would take.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE AVENGER.

So absorbed were the group around Rodney, that the entrance of three strangers into their midst was unnoticed. In fact, before their presence attracted any attention, they had gained the very center of the party, two of them standing upon either side of the fellow who had denounced Rodney Drew. The third was nearly behind him.

A quick glance passed between the trio. Then the rearmost of the party bent forward, and touched the surrounded fellow lightly, saying, at the same time, in a confidential tone:

"Robbins!"

The person addressed turned quickly, with not

a little surprise manifested upon his features. As he did so, one of those beside him caught his whiskers, and the whole mass parted from his smoothly-shaven face.

"You're jest the feller we want," they said, grasping him by each hand, and quietly disarming him. "We've got track of the chap that stole the German's gold, and we'll jest trouble you to go back to Cobble Run, if you ain't busy."

The disguised individual was none other than he who had been so boldly accused by Maggie Brown of the crime. He struggled fearfully for a moment, but could do nothing in the grasp of the strong men who held him.

"Look here, my fine fellers," he said, as his hands were forced behind him and bound, "you can't play that. I've been tried once for stealin' that gold, and let off. Thar's the man that did it; why don't you take him? You can't try me ag'in, you know."

"We'll see about that. We've found out a thing or two since you left, and Maggie Brown won't be the only one to swear ag'in' ye this time. No, old fellow, you may as well make up your mind to swing about to-morrow."

Robbins did not reply, but gnashed his teeth and glared upon the men in a manner which boded no good for them should he ever be at liberty again.

"What is it?" asked one of the Prospect miners. "Do you suspect the man of a robbery?"

"No, we don't suspect anything of the kind. We've got proof of it."

He then detailed the manner in which Rodney had been implicated, and the events which followed. It seemed that, after the charges made against him by Maggie, Robbins had not dared to remain there longer, but disguised himself, assumed another name, and repaired to Prospect Vein. Immediately after he left, the facts of the case leaked out, and men were sent out to arrest and bring him back. This they had done, and were happy to inform Rodney that if himself and George Dayton would return they would be gladly welcomed.

"Then you don't think he done the robbin'?" asked the tall miner, pointing to Rodney.

"We know he didn't," re-explained the speaker of the arresting party. "At first it seemed he must be guilty, and everybody thought he was. But now we all know different, and not a man but feels ashamed to think he ever suspected such a thing."

"Look here, chap," the tall miner pursued, turning to Drew, "I reckon I war a bit hasty. Jest you say it's all right, and I'll go onto the mountain with ye or anywhars else."

"You were not to blame, certainly," was the free reply. "Only hereafter, remember to give strangers a fair show before condemning them. But all this time we are delaying. Those poor men in the mountains may be dying. Let us go; who will follow?"

This time there was no need of a second call. The miners felt heartily ashamed of the manner in which they had received Rodney, and nearly every one expressed their intention of accompanying him, to atone for their injustice to him.

About thirty of the best armed finally made what little preparation was necessary, and set forth. However fast they might travel, it seemed to Rodney that they were unnecessarily slow. He kept the lead from the first, and continually urged his followers to greater exertions.

The latter were by no means disposed to dally. Time was precious to them, and they were really anxious to see the termination of their adventure. Up and down hills they wended, using little caution, since it did not seem any force of Indians could be found capable of facing them.

"Jest wait till they catch sight of us, if you want tew see some tall runnin'," remarked one of the party; a view in which all the others coincided.

Rodney was not so certain of that.

"I wish we had Lute Cook here, to lead us," he remarked. "I should feel surer of success. We may make some fatal mistake, though I trust not."

But, his anticipations were not shared by any of his companions. So far from adopting any precautionary measures as they neared the place, they were only anxious to push forward with greater dispatch.

They were within less than half a mile of the cave, when one of the party, well toward the rear, uttered a cry, and raised his arm, transfixed by an arrow!

None had seen the daring shot, though it had been sent from the front, and one man affirmed that something like a ray of light had risen from a given point, though he had taken no particular notice of it.

Several of the men then grasped their rifles, ready for instant use, and rushed toward the spot. No human being was in sight, however, and they returned to the main body.

It was now deemed best to throw out scouts, and approach with more care. The fact that one of their number had been wounded by an unseen marksman seemed to dampen the courage of the balance to a considerable degree: not only were they far from anxious to act as scouts, but some advised that the main body wait till the position of the Indians was ascertained. To this proposition Rodney would not listen for a moment.

"That will give the savages time to get off without any punishment," he said, "and that will never do. Now that we have force enough we must teach them to respect us. If we do not, our tents may not long be in safety. We must follow the advance so closely that when the Indians are discovered we can strike a deadly blow."

This plan adopted, the party set forward again, this time in better order, and observing more caution. They moved as rapidly as possible until within twenty rods of the cavern, without seeing any further signs of the red-men. Rodney began to fear that they had escaped altogether.

Up they went, nearer and still nearer, till the foremost gazed upon the trampled bushes about the mouth of the cavern. Not an Indian was to be seen. They had been there lately, as a fire was still smoking not far away. Approaching the entrance, all around which

the earth was blackened by smoke and plowed by bullets, Rodney bent down and called:

"Century!"

"Here we are," replied the clear voice of Charles, and quick, glad words came from the interior.

At that moment, however, other sounds filled the ears of the miners. From a small thicket not far away came such a chorus of whoops and yells as might have been heard if

"All the fiends that fell,
Had pealed the banner-cry of hell."

A scattered volley of musketry, and flight of arrows came from the concealed Indians as they broke cover and dashed toward the white men, still filling the air with their indescribable yells.

Two of the miners fell, wounded, and the balance were disconcerted at the suddenness of the attack.

An answering whoop broke upon the air as Lute Cook sprung forward to the front.

"Hurrah, boys! Into the cusses!" he yelled.

His rifle cracked, and with the report one of the savages dropped. As the smoke raised, Cook was to be seen dashing toward the surprised Utes, brandishing a revolver in each hand.

"Come on—come on!" shouted Rodney, as he saw the situation of affairs. "He'll be killed if we don't help him."

With a loud shout the whole party darted forward, and as they did so the savages turned to flee. But close behind them, like an avenging spirit, came Cook, his revolvers flashing fire and death as he gradually gained upon them.

His daring recklessness animated the miners, and away went pursued and pursuers, up the steep mountain ascent, down through dark and trackless ravines, among bushes, briars and rocky dells.

One after another of the Indians fell, but they had no opportunity for avenging the unfortunate ones. On flew the survivors, panting, wearied, hopeless. And every glance behind showed them that wild, awful-looking figure, close upon them, grasping those dreadful weapons whose every note was a signal of doom to some one of their number! And not he alone, but behind and around him came kindred spirits, anxious to assist the avenger in his work of destruction.

On, still on, mile after mile they fled, till at length even the fierce spirit of the old hunter was satisfied, and he paused, dropped his pistols to the ground, and stood trembling like a hunted stag.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UNFOLDING.

RODNEY DREW had not followed the pursuit any great distance. Seeing that the men were fully engaged in the work of vengeance, he turned and hastened back to the cavern. Cook alone had come forth, and as he knew the elder Century was wounded, he felt some apprehensions that all might not be well with the old man.

It was so dark inside the cavern that he could not see at first, but was immediately aware that a gentle hand was laid upon his arm.

"My father is very weak, sir," said Charles, for it was he. "Please to come this way, for he wishes much to see you. Ah, I fear he cannot live long!"

Rodney followed his guide, and soon knelt beside the sufferer. Century raised his eyes, and what was intended as a smile appeared. But it was faint, and so full of pain and fear that it made the young man shudder.

"Well, you've come at last," he said, endeavoring to move, but without success.

"Yes, we've succeeded in driving off the Indians, and when you are able we will take you outside, where there is better air."

"Don't talk of it," was the hopeless reply. "I'm about finished; what life I've got is some that I've saved for this occasion."

"You feel faint and bad," returned Drew. "No wonder. This place is bad enough to kill well people, much more those that are wounded."

The sufferer lay with closed eyes for some time, and now that Rodney was somewhat accustomed to the light, he was able to observe his features more closely. That scrutiny assured the observer that there was no hope of saving the wounded man's life. Indeed, the shadow of coming dissolution was already there.

Under ordinary circumstances Rodney would have known how to speak and appear at ease, but there, in the presence of the grim shadow, he felt unable to bring any words into use. But he was not left long in a state of embarrassment. Century opened his eyes again and beckoned to his son.

"Charles," he said, huskily, "bring me a little more water. I feel very faint, and my throat is parched."

The youth hastened to obey, and while he was gone the father remarked:

"Poor Charles! I haven't been the father I ought to be. I ain't fit to die, but fit or not makes no odds now. I've tried to be better for a day or two, but it never amounted to anything. Be kind to Charles, young sir, for his heart is all bound up in yours."

There was something in the words which sounded strangely, and Rodney fancied that the man's mind wandered. But at that moment Charles returned with some water, and the sufferer drank a full draught. Its effect was apparent, for he breathed easier in a moment.

"Charles, you may go and see if Cook isn't comin'," said the father, "and if he ain't you may wait for him. Drew'll call you when I want you."

There was an expression of alarm upon the youth's features as he moved away, and Rodney felt slightly startled for the moment. But the next words of the elder Century reassured him.

"I've got suthin' to tell ye," he said, moving himself by an effort, so as to look more directly at the person he addressed. "I'd like it if Cook was here, but he knows already."

He paused for a moment, then said, abruptly: "Did you ever think that Charles was not my child?"

"I always supposed he was," returned Rod-

ney, filled with conjectures by the manner of the speaker.

"*She is!*" was the decided answer, "and it is time now that I come to speak of her *as* she is."

"Good heavens! Is Charles—"

"Charles is not Charles, but Charlotte, sir!"

"Then this son of yours is not a son, but a daughter, if I comprehend the matter fully?"

"Just that, sir; no more nor less. Now, I'm goin' to tell you how it come about. Of course you need not tell any more of this than you're a mind to."

"I will not speak of it, if you so wish."

"That is good. Ten years ago I was well-to-do in the State of Kentucky. I had a comfortable farm and a few negroes. But the California discovery set me crazy, and I went off there. In two weeks after I got into the mines I was a rich man. I had most extraordinary luck, and set off for San Francisco to have a gay time through the winter. I am almost ashamed to say that I visited the gambling dens, and finally took hold of the cards for money myself. You can guess the rest. In a week I lost all I had."

"I managed to live through the winter, and in the spring set off for the diggings again. This time I was not in luck. I dug steadily all the season, often shifting my ground, and when winter came again I had but barely enough to take me home. I came, and found that my home had been assailed by the cholera, and all save a daughter ten or eleven years old had died!"

"How I cursed the gaming-table then; yes, and everything else, even to my Maker! I had not been very bad before this, but now I let loose. Till gold was discovered here near the Peak I lived as best I could. Then I formed the idea of coming out to these regions. Not to dig gold—I had experienced far too much of that already. But I intended to establish a gaming-hell. I felt sure that would be the best way to get rich."

"I made my daughter, now a young woman, whose life had been a living rebuke to me, disguise herself as a boy, so that I might be provided with an assistant whom I could trust. She, with a heart full of love for me, did so, though with tears and remonstrances."

"My den was established, and for a short time all went well. But I soon found that I was not sure of wealth, even in that. My bank was broken, and I was left without capital. At the same time a rival establishment was doing well. I was determined to succeed, in spite of fate. We left for the diggings, discovered that rich deposit at which we were working when you first saw us, and were ready to return to Denver again and resume business. But the Indians came upon us, drove us into this hole, and finally killed me. It's just enough; I've no right to complain."

He paused for a short time, as he was growing weaker all the while. After a few moments' rest he added:

"You and Cook must see to Charlotte, for you are all the friends she has. There is no property for her to look after, for I have spent it all."

"I will see that she is well cared for," the young man said.

And then a strange fancy came into his head. He was sure that something had drawn him toward the supposed young man strangely, and now it seemed clear to him.

"Would Charlotte be a proper wife for me?" he asked, feeling sure that he should receive a candid answer.

"There ain't a purer or better girl on this whole earth," was the earnest reply. "She's an angel, sir, if there ar' such things on earth."

"And do you think she would be willing to marry me?"

"Yes, sir, I know it, though I have never spoken with her in regard to the matter. But her words and actions showed me enough. Her heart is yours."

"And would you be satisfied to place her in my keeping?"

"Perfectly. Settle it with her, and be good. Let her lead you in that respect, for she is better and wiser than we men."

There was a moment's silence, and then Century added:

"Call her now. I am feeling faint again. It's about over with me."

Before the young man had time to regain his feet, Charlotte, as we will henceforth call her, appeared. A deep flush was upon her cheek; that the young man knew her secret, her womanly instinct told her.

"Charlotte," said her father, "I have told him all. He will care for you. Please bring me some more water. I shall not require much more."

She hastened away in obedience to the request, and when she returned her father drank but a swallow.

"There is no taste in it," he moaned. "Oh, why needs our spring to fail, of all things else, at this time?"

Charlotte wept, for she knew that the waters of the spring had not changed their purity. Little of affection as there had been between them for the past years, it was a fearful thing to stand by and see her father die in such a miserable place.

Rodney went to the open air again, for he hoped that some of the pursuers had returned; and with their help he wished to move the dying man to a more pleasant scene. But none of them had yet come in, and he was about to return, disappointed, when he saw some moving forms not far away. He looked again, and saw that they were none other than George Dayton and Maggie Brown. At sight of him they hastened forward, and both grasped his hand warmly.

"So you done it, Rodney! Good for you! But, blame me if I had any great faith in it. How's everything?"

Drew briefly related the state of affairs, how the men were still driving the Indians over the mountains, and that Pete Century was lying at the point of death.

"His son's all right, I suppose?"

"Yes, and the most singular fact of all is that the son isn't a son at all, but a devoted daughter!"

"How? What's that? A woman in disguise?"

Rodney, that beats all! Have you fell in love with her?"

"That's a quick question."

"I'll bet an ounce you have! Come now, own up. If you hain't, do so at once, and let's go back to the States."

At this point the voice of Charlotte was heard, in frightened tones:

"Please, come in a moment, Rodney. Oh, my father!"

Both the men hastened inside, but before they reached the scene Pete Century had seen the last of earth. Charlotte stood beside the senseless clay, weeping as though her heart would break. Rodney took her hand gently in his own, and led her away, saying:

"This is not a good place for you, Charlotte. Come forth into the pure air, and see how pleasant is its breath. You will find a good, kind girl outside, who will be your friend and companion. You can trust her."

Charlotte went forth, and while listening to the kind words of Maggie, felt more truly the worth of friendship than she had done for years.

"I have found a friend," she said, when Rodney came forth.

The young man took her hand and drew her a little aside.

"That friend is the promised wife of my friend, George Dayton. They are going back to the States to be married, and find in a quiet, happy life something more valuable far than all the gold about Pike's Peak. Shall we go with them?"

There was something in the glance of his eye, and the pressure he gave her hand, which asked a deeper question than the words themselves. Charlotte gave one glance into his earnest eyes, and replied:

"I have no friends save you and the girl yonder. If you wish me to do so, and will learn me to be what you desire me to be, I will not refuse. But I am poor and so unworthy!" And she shed tears.

"Do you not love me? If you can feel toward me one-half the affection which the past hour has assured me I bear for you, nothing on earth can prevent our happiness."

"Alas, sir, you have not given utterance to anything but what I can truly repeat, save that my affection for you commenced when first I saw you, weak and wounded. But—but—"

"Then I need ask no more. You shall be my own dear one forever."

"See here, Rodney," said George, coming toward them. "We've gold enough to take us home."

And he displayed two small pouches, which Rodney knew to be the ones they had left in the bush-cabin near the mines. There was, indeed, a plentiful supply for the purpose mentioned, and he remarked:

"Then we had better return to the States again, hadn't we, George?"

"I think so, and I guess somebody else thinks so, too," was the sly reply.

Very soon the returning miners began to pour in from the pursuit of the savages. Among the last that came was Lute Cook. He manifested some sorrow at the death of Century, but stoutly affirmed that he was well avenged.

And now the party was ready to proceed homeward. The corpse of the fallen man was brought forth, and borne upon a rude litter down into a quiet valley, where he was interred as decently as could be under the circumstances.

That night our party of lovers, with Lute Cook, rested at Prospect Vein, and sweet was the sense of security which now came to them.

The following day they proceeded to Cobble Run, anxious to know how the trial of Dexter Robbins terminated. Charlotte still wore her disguise, it being impossible to obtain any wearing apparel for her in the diggings.

As they gained the vicinity of the grocery, which they all remembered save Charlotte, an unusual commotion was manifest.

"Are you not afraid of your father, if we venture into the place?" asked George of Maggie.

"No, for Rufus Brown is not my father. He was a relative of my father, and when I was left an orphan I went to live with him. At length he came here, and wished me to pass myself off as his daughter. I did so, but he has no claims upon me."

"Thank fortune for that."

They found that the cause of excitement was the trial of Robbins, which was near its close when they reached the place. Still, Maggie was called upon again to testify, which she did in the same spirit as before.

The verdict of "GUILTY" was pronounced, and in half an hour naught remained of the desperado save a lifeless mass.

The gold which had been taken from the ruins of the Century cabin was nearly all produced, and delivered to Charlotte, the miners joining in endeavors to testify their repentance for the wrong they had so nearly done.

But no amount of persuasion could induce our party to remain longer in the mines. Both the young men felt that they had found invaluable prizes, and hastened to the States by the quickest means. Lute Cook was urged to go with them, but he declined, and is still hunting and trapping in the Wild West.

Of our principal characters we have said nearly all we intended. They returned to their homes, settled down to sober realities, and began to fight the battles of real life. Maggie is as faithful to her husband now as when she periled her life to save him from a felon's doom, and Charlotte, a dutiful wife and noble mother, shows her former disguise at times, and gives to delighted listeners the story of that dreary Mountain Den.

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